

## BY COMPTON MACKENZIE

### *Novels and Romances*

SINISTER STREET  
 SYLVIA SCARLETT  
 GUY AND PAULINE  
 CARNIVAL  
 FIGURE OF EIGHT  
 CORAL  
 THE VANITY GIRL  
 RIGUES AND VAGABONDS  
 THE ALTAR STEPS  
 HEARSON'S PROGRESS  
 THE HEAVENLY LADDER  
 HUNTING THE FAIRIES  
 HISKEY GALORE  
 KEEP THE HOME GUARD TURNING  
 THE RIVAL MONSTER  
 THE MONARCH OF THE GLEN  
 THE RED LAPEL COAT  
 POOR RELATIONS  
 APRIL FOOLS  
 RICH RELATIONS  
 BUTTERCUPS AND DAISIES  
 WATERCRESS AND THE BRAIN  
 VESTA  
 EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN  
 EXTRIMISMI  
 THE THREE COURIERS  
 OUR STRIFE  
 THE DARKENING GREEN  
 THE PASSIONATE ELOPEMENT  
 FAIRY GOLD  
 THE SEVEN AGES OF WOMAN  
 THE OLD MEN OF THE SEA  
 THE FOUR WINDS OF LOVE:  
 THE EAST WIND  
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 THE ADVENTURES OF TWO CHAIRS  
 THE ENCHANTED ISLAND  
 THE NAUGHTY MOBILE  
 THE FAIRY IN THE WINDOW BOX  
 THE STAIRS THAT KEPT ON  
 GOING DOWN

# Echoes



COMPTON MACKENZIE

CHATTO & WINDUS  
LONDON

**PUBLISHED BY  
CHATTO AND WINDUS LTD.  
LONDON**



**CLARKE, IRWIN AND CO. LTD.  
TORONTO**

To  
JOHN and LUCILE MOORE  
with much affection



## Acknowledgments

ACKNOWLEDGMENT is made to The British Broadcasting Corporation and to *The Listener* and *London Calling* in which these talks first appeared.

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# Sir Edward Elgar

\* \* \* \* \*

WHEN I look back on the composers I have met, it seems to me that the only ones who have always unmistakably resembled composers have been the composers of jazz. Sir Charles Stanford looked like a country gentleman, Sir Hubert Parry looked like a country gentleman, and Sir Edward Elgar looks like a country gentleman. Perhaps it was this very air of a country gentleman coming up to town for lunch at his club that enabled me in the early days of my interest in the gramophone to feel less abashed than I might have been expected to feel in venturing to talk to Sir Edward in the Savile on the subject which was occupying so much of my thoughts. So long as the conversation remained firmly centred on the mechanical side of the gramophone all went well, but when, as was inevitable sooner or later with such a conversation, it began to circle round the topic of music itself, Sir Edward shut up abruptly.

'I really take no interest in music any longer,' he told me, with that in his voice which warned me not to attempt to sit at his feet. Perhaps his kindness perceived that I was feeling uncomfortable at having trespassed, as it were, into a private garden with a very high wall round it, for presently he turned to me and asked if I had ever used a microscope. I told him that I had had a microscope when I was very young, but that in later years I had neglected it.

'That is a mistake,' he observed, 'you should take it up again. I find that with the microscope I can enter fairyland whenever I wish.'

And as he spoke, there was a note in his voice which

has remained vividly in my memory as a revelation of a mystical beauty to which he had penetrated and to which he was showing me the way. I have never since listened to any of his music without remembering the world of exquisite miniature he evoked that afternoon, or the subtle variety of the pattern he wove in that London club, as exquisite and various a pattern indeed as his own music.

Warned by our first conversation I never attempted, when I had the privilege of talking to him on other occasions, to mention of my own accord the subject of music. But on another afternoon while we were sitting in the billiard-room of the old Savile Club I heard from the further end of the long settee the voice of W. J. Turner say that he was going to the Queen's Hall to hear the *Symphonie Fantastique* of Berlioz. Suddenly and sharply Sir Edward said to me:

'What's that about the *Symphonie Fantastique*?'

When I told him that it was being played that afternoon in the Queen's Hall, he asked me if I had ever heard it, and on my telling him that I had not he asked me if I would like to hear it, and that if I would, he would take me with him to hear it, because it was a piece of music which one ought to hear and appreciate for its importance in the development of the art.

'There is one thing in it,' he added, 'which is really tremendous, and that is the *March to the Guillotine*.'

It was a Saturday afternoon, and as we drove along Piccadilly in the taxi to Queen's Hall I was aware while I listened to Sir Edward talking about Berlioz and Berlioz's world of music that I was enjoying a momentous occasion in my life. I was indeed listening with such absorption that the taxi with Sir Edward and myself inside it seemed to be standing still while the houses of Piccadilly and Regent Street flowed past on either side until Queen's Hall reached

us, and it would have taken Dante to describe the awe I felt when following my Virgil upstairs to the first circle.

The concert opened with Strauss's *Don Juan*, but who the conductor of the concert was I cannot remember, for to my fancy the whole of the orchestra and the whole of the audience was being conducted by my companion. It was not until the Berlioz symphony began that I became aware of the emotion to which Sir Edward was exposed by the music. He was like a man in a strong gale of wind. Once or twice when tiresome people in front turned round and stared curiously at him I wanted to pick them up and pitch them over into the stalls, because they looked so idiotic staring at one who was himself music and yet whom they were only supposing to be a rather fidgety colonel. When the long third movement was over Sir Edward turned to me and said:

'Now I am going to mark for you the rhythm of this astounding march to the guillotine.'

And mark it he did most vigorously on my ribs. Then he got angry because the cymbal player was not handling his cymbals in the way they ought to be handled, and ejaculated under his breath several uncomplimentary remarks about him, whereupon some floppy young woman in front turned round and said 'Hush!' She might as well have tried to hush Vesuvius in full eruption as Sir Edward Elgar that afternoon, for the merciless rhythm of that march was having such an effect upon him that I should not have been surprised if he had suddenly leapt from his seat, vaulted over the floppy young woman in front, and landed down on the conductor's dais in order to make that cymbal player handle his cymbals in the way he thought they ought to be handled. The crisis, however, was reached just as the oboist put his instrument to his mouth to play that ghastly phrase which signified the last agony of the man about to

be executed. He must have caught sight of Sir Edward Elgar in the circle at that moment, and whether he thought it was his wraith or his ghost or Sir Edward Elgar himself I do not know. I have never seen on any man's face an expression of such horrified surprise, but when I turned and saw Sir Edward's eyes flashing down to where he was sitting I wondered that he was able to emit a sound from his oboe.

During the last movement the great man who had given me such a memorable experience sat back, apparently exhausted by the emotion of the music; and at the end of the symphony he rose abruptly.

'You are not going to stay to hear the Rachmaninoff Concerto?' I asked.

'No, no,' said Sir Edward. 'As I have told you, I do not take the slightest interest in music any longer, but you'd better stay and hear it.'

With this he hurried away up the aisle, the glances of the floppy young woman in front, who had only come to Queen's Hall to adore Rachmaninoff, following him indignantly.

With Sir Edward's departure the atmosphere became so ordinary as to seem heavy, and though Rachmaninoff himself was playing, and though I have no doubt he gave a splendid performance of his last Concerto, I have never been bored so intensely by music, and I have never wished so much for a concerto to come to an end. I have told this story at length and for the first time, because I feel that it may do more to suggest to those who are hearing Sir Edward's music some of the dynamic force of his personality in the art of to-day than any amount of pretty programme writing about his works.

'When I was a small boy,' Sir Edward once told me, 'I said to my mother that one day it would be enough to

write my name on a letter for it to find me, and a little while ago I did get a postcard from the other end of the world simply addressed to me by name with no place or country.'

Those who have followed with him that elusive spirit of delight in the Second Symphony, who have pondered with him the sombre agony of the war in the Violoncello Concerto, who seem to hear, nay, more than hear, to be a veritable part of the sea as he, most utterly English of composers has let them hear and be, in his *Sea Pictures*, who have dreamed through the gracious romance of his Piano Quintet, who have failed to solve the lovely riddle of the *Enigma Variations*, who have been carried out of their dull selves by the *Dream of Gerontius*, who have seen his fame grow not as a fashion but as a mighty tree, those will not be astonished that so simple an address was sufficient.



# Ellen Terry

\* \* \* \* \*

I RECALL from sixty years ago on the Wedgwood-blue wall of my father's library a framed photograph of a group taken in the garden of G. F. Watts the painter and signed below by each of the various members of it. All those names have faded from my memory, except one of them written with a thick nib in very black ink. That name was Ellen Watts and the figure above was then a slim and beautiful girl of just seventeen. There cannot be many signatures of Ellen Terry as Ellen Watts surviving from that brief marriage with a middle-aged invalid which lasted hardly eighteen months, and indeed I do not know where even that photograph is to-day.

I did not meet Ellen Terry herself until the year 1898 when I was a month or two over fifteen. My mother and I went to see *The Medicine Man* at the Lyceum, an unsuccessful drama of which I remember nothing except a room with a large gilded cage full of canaries. It had one distinction, however, which was of being the only play for some twenty years in which Irving appeared in modern dress except the one-act play about a veteran of Waterloo by Conan Doyle.

Suddenly in the obscurity at the back of the box appeared the tall lean shape of Irving himself in a frock-coat, and he asked my mother to come behind during the longest interval between the acts. While she and Irving talked about the past (it was my grandfather who had started him on his Lyceum career a quarter of a century before), I sat with Ellen Terry in her dressing-room. Just before it was time to return to the front of the house she

asked me what I was going to be when I grew up. At that particular moment in my youth it was my intention to be a parson. 'Well,' she said, 'I shall come and hear your first sermon.' And as if to seal a promise she kissed me.

The other day I visited the ancient little house at Smallhythe in Kent where she spent the last twenty-eight years of her life. It is now in the keeping of the National Trust, and in one room hang many of the dresses in which she played her parts. I doubt if anybody else of my age would be able to see with the mind's eye her who wore them once upon a time move across the stage in those dresses, which remain now just as they were when she wore them for the last time. Of course, many people older than myself could recall her in them, but I think it would be unlikely for any other boy to see almost every play performed between 1890 and 1900.

There hangs the dress with high puffed sleeves which she wore as Beatrice. At least fifty-five years have passed since I saw her in *Much Ado About Nothing*, but I can still hear Irving say when Benedick and Beatrice are left alone on the stage at the end of the Church scene:

*'Come, bid me do anything for thee,'*

and the reply of Beatrice:

*'Kill Claudio.'*

And I, my feelings outraged by the way Claudio had treated Hero, could hardly refrain from breaking in with grateful applause.

I always think it was a pity that *As You Like It* was never put on by Irving. I suppose he felt that Rosalind would have too much of the limelight. Yet he would have

been an admirable Jacques, and indeed for that matter an admirable Touchstone, and what a Rosalind Ellen Terry would have been!

She looked magnificent as Lady Macbeth. That dress of emerald green and purple in which she was painted by Sargent may still be seen at Smallhythe. Nevertheless, I do not fancy she was a really great Lady Macbeth, for I hardly remember her performance, whereas Irving's Macbeth is still vivid in my mind. Ellen Terry excelled in pathos and comedy, but not, I think, in tragedy. She was exquisite in such a part as Olivia in the brief dramatized version of *The Vicar of Wakefield*; in her black dress she seemed the very embodiment of Goldsmith's lines:

*When lovely woman stoops to folly,  
And finds too late that men betray,  
What charm can sooth her melancholy?  
What art can wash her guilt away?*

And with what rich humour in the same bill she sometimes played Madame Sans-Gêne—a spectacular piece of dramatic contrast.

I saw Réjane herself as Madame Sans-Gêne and in spite of the advantage of French she was not so very much better than Ellen Terry in the part. Portia is to my fancy a tiresome woman, and *The Merchant of Venice* has been completely distorted by playing Shylock for the sympathy of the audience. However, this I can say, Ellen Terry was the only Portia I have seen that was able to make her not merely eloquent and astute but also lovable. She could even give life to Imogen, and by the way Irving was a magnificent Iachimo. There was a revival of *Cymbeline* not so long ago, and . . . well, I prefer to think of it as it was played once upon a time at the Lyceum, though not

even Irving and Ellen Terry could secure it a long run. Irving's production of *Henry VIII* was a magnificent affair, but I remember both Ellen Terry as Queen Katherine and Forbes Robertson as Buckingham better than Irving himself as Wolsey. I did not have the chance to see Ellen Terry as Ophelia or Desdemona, but I remember her Cordelia as being very moving. Besides Shakespeare I saw her as Marguerite in *Faust*, as Jeannette in *The Lyons Mail*, and in one or two other plays, but the memory of her in any of these is now faint.

I remember Ellen Terry as Guinivere in Comyns Carr's play *King Arthur* better than I remember Irving as Arthur. The love scene between Guinivere and Launcelot, played by Forbes Robertson, had for its setting a bower of hawthorn in prodigal flower. It seemed to me—eleven years old at the time—the most romantic and the most thrilling scene I had ever watched. The music of the spheres was in that voice of hers when she murmured 'Launcelot'. It is idle to try to evoke the sound of a voice that is still for those who never heard it, and if I say it had a kind of huskiness in moments of deep emotion I shall probably only succeed in suggesting a mild laryngitis. O that bower of hawthorn! It may have been mere stage hawthorn of the ultra-realistic kind of scenery that Irving loved to lavish on his audiences, but all the Mays of my boyhood seem now enshrined in its blossom. *King Arthur* was not a success, and I dare say it was a piece of tushery we should not be able to tolerate to-day; for me it was an outstanding emotional experience and it was Ellen Terry's Guinivere that inspired it. Even to-day when I read the noblest pages of English prose in the language—I mean the last book of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, it is the voice of Ellen Terry I hear when Guinivere takes her last farewell of Launcelot:

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‘Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never see me more in the visage; and I command thee, on God’s behalf, that thou forsake my company, and to thy kingdom thou turn again, and keep well thy realm from war and wrake; for as well as I have loved thee, mine heart will not serve me to see thee, for through thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed.’

The meeting with her I recall most vividly after that first one in her dressing-room at the Lyceum was in the Provost’s garden at Worcester College, Oxford, in 1903. Her daughter Edith Craig was with her, as formidable a personality to an undergraduate as her mother was the reverse. Ellen Terry’s laughter, sounding light as bird-song upon that sunny lawn so vividly green in a rainy June, ripples across the flood of fifty years. I was playing Gratiano in the production of *The Merchant of Venice* by the Oxford University Dramatic Society that month and I might have been the most important actor in Europe by the interest she took in my notion of the way the part was to be played.

‘You’ll have the audience against you all through the trial scene,’ she warned me. ‘You know that? You see, nowadays Shylock is really the hero, and sometimes I’ve thought that Portia herself is quite unpopular with the audience when she gives her reading of the bond.’

And soon after this Cunninghame Graham, as handsome and courtly and graceful a figure as I had ever seen, or indeed am ever likely to see again, came up to salute Ellen Terry, which he did by bending over to kiss her hand.

To the end of her days Ellen Terry remained intensely and immensely interested in other people. I have met few

actresses with as much warmth of humanity, and still fewer film-stars.

I wish she had not for financial reasons had to go on acting until the time came when she could never learn her lines and when she was given parts which really were not worth while playing. There must be many people who never saw her act until that last decade of her career and whose memory of her when in due course they indulge in this kind of reminiscence must falsify the great actress and great woman that Ellen Terry was.

I ask myself why I call her a great woman. One thinks of somebody like Mrs. Siddons when one uses such an epithet about an actress. But I fancy that Mrs. Siddons must have played the part of greatness off the stage. Ellen Terry certainly never did that. She was as simple and natural all through her life as she had been when she was the girl-wife of a humourless valetudinarian painter, and I think that to remain simple and natural after a long lifetime of the limelight is a sufficient claim to greatness. That austere little bedroom of hers at Smallhythe remains the perfect expression of her inherent humility. She was too good an actress on the stage to have the slightest need to act off it. I mentioned earlier the interest she took in my performance of Gratiano as an undergraduate. I remember sitting next her once at some performance of a Dramatic School, and there was not a single young person of whom she did not want to know as much as I could tell her.

For her acting was not primarily the need of self-expression, but the desire to express other people for an audience. And what can be said of her acting can be said with equal truth of her whole life.

# Memories of Henry James

\* \* \* \* \*

It is a fine May morning in the year 1890, and I am walking with my father down the Broad Walk in Kensington Gardens on the way to call upon Mr. Henry James who, my father has just informed me impressively, is a great novelist.

'When I was a year or two older than you are now,' he went on, 'your Uncle Henry and I were walking with your grandfather in Kensington Gardens when we met a friend of his, a tall gentleman who, before he went on, took out a red purse and divided the money in it between us two boys. That was Mr. Thackeray, and he was a very great novelist.' I began to be interested in great novelists.

We passed the balloon-woman by the gate of the Broad Walk and crossed the road into De Vere Gardens, where Henry James lived in a house about half-way along on the left-hand side. At that date he had a fairly full dark-brown beard and I recall a slight restless anxiety in his manner. He may have been embarrassed by the presence of a small boy. The purpose of my father's visit was to discuss a dramatisation James was making of his own book *The American*. While my seniors were gravely talking I looked round the room, much interested by the variety of the great novelist's accommodation for his work. On the right of the window was a desk at which he could write standing. Along the wall on the left, there was a day bed with a swivel-desk attached, on which he could write lying. In front of the window was a large kneehole desk at which he could write sitting. Observing my eyes wandering round these engines of his craft, Henry James explained to me



with elaborate courtesý their purposes. Then I brought out my birthday-book. I was an old hand at this business of asking people to write their names on the date they were born. The first inscription in that birthday-book was made in Chester in the year 1886 by Judge Hughes, the author of *Tom Brown's School Days*. To his name, in the space for his birthday on April 15, James added the date on which he wrote it—May 5, 1890. And then we took our leave. Alas, no red purse was emptied into my hand, and I decided that great novelists were unreliable folk.

That autumn Henry James went up to Sheffield, where my father, Edward Compton, was playing his annual week of Old English comedies at the Theatre Royal, in order to read his play to the company. James sat on the stage with his back to the empty auditorium, and by the illumination of the two gas-jets in what used to be called a T-light, he read *The American* to the company sitting round in a semicircle. Another famous novelist was in that semicircle, for A. E. W. Mason was then a young man in the Compton Comedy Company. The reading began at ten and continued till after three. When it was over my father called on the author to take a quick walk before they went back to dinner at four o'clock.

'Well?' said James anxiously as they walked along, 'what . . . er . . . what is your . . . er . . . first immediate impression, my dear Compton?'

'The play's too long,' said my father.

'Too long?' the playwright postulant gasped. Then he stopped to hold my father's arm in an almost agonized appeal. 'Too long?' he repeated in bewilderment. 'Did I understand you to say it was too long?'

'Much too long,' he was told. 'It took you well over five hours to read it to the company. Add the intervals to that, and if the curtain went up at half-past seven it would



be one o'clock in the morning before it came down on the last act.'

'But what . . . what shall we, as they say, do about it?' the playwright asked, dazed by so unexpected a criticism.

'We must cut it,' my father said.

Henry James pressed a hand to his heart. 'Cut it?' he quavered. 'Did I . . . did you, my dear Compton, say "cut it"?''

'By at least two hours,' my father replied firmly.

'But who will perform this ruthless . . . this . . . monstrous piece of surgery?' James asked.

'My wife is good at cutting,' he was assured.

So for the next two months a long correspondence went on between my mother and Henry James, much of it in the shape of very long and very elaborately phrased telegrams from the playwright in which he would surrender two or three words at a time. However, the play was tried out in the provinces early in 1891, and finally produced in London at the Opera Comique Theatre in September of that year.

To return to Sheffield for a moment. After dinner, my father asked Henry James if he would care to see *The School for Scandal*, which was being played that night. So James went, and at the end of the performance came round to my father's dressing-room. For some time he talked about anything except the performance, until the actor-manager asked at last:

'Well, what did you think of *The School for Scandal*?'

Henry James shook his head in retrospective perplexity. 'A curious old play,' he said at last, half to himself. 'A very curious old play.'

Henry James had something approaching horror of the eighteenth century. Many years later, when my mother begged his good offices to draw William Heinemann's

attention to my first novel, *The Passionate Elopement*, which had just been submitted for his approval, he kindly wrote to Heinemann but expressed his concern at my wasting any of what he called my 'latent energy' on that monstrous century.

The last time I saw Henry James was in October 1914 just before I was returning to Capri after various vain efforts to get into the war. He received me at the flat off Cheyne Walk with a kind of ceremonious warmth and led me to his study.

'And now, my dear boy, make yourself as comfortable as, in this monstrous time of war, comfort either of body or of mind is . . .' he paused to grasp at the adjective floating for a moment out of his reach, and then, just as his fingers were closing upon it, or rather (I become Jamesian myself as the memory of the scene recurs)—or rather pausing like a butterfly-hunter, net in air, to swoop upon the perfect adjective and imprison it in the reticulation of his prose—at that moment his housekeeper came into the room. Henry James looked round for the epithet now well on its way to escape, desperation in his mild and magnificent eye, and then his housekeeper said gently but most firmly:

'It's about the marm-'ade, Mr. James.'

'Marmalade?' he ejaculated.

'Marmalade from the Army and Navy Stores,' she insisted.

Henry James turned to me.

'Will you, my dear boy, try to entertain—or perhaps not so much entertain as engage yourself with a book while I devote a minute or two of most unwilling attention, or rather tortured concentration upon one of these hideous encounters with domestic necessity. A vast emporium, one of those appalling achievements of our modern

craving for the huge, the immense, looms between myself and this delightful company of yours, to the enjoyment of which I have been looking forward with a so lively . . .'

'Mr. James,' his housekeeper interposed, with hardly concealed impatience, 'the man from the Army and Navy Stores is waiting for the order.'

'In one moment, Mrs. Dash. I will not keep you a moment. Now, my dear boy, here is our dear H. G. Wells's last book. Full of that Wellsian quality which sometimes flows perhaps a little too . . . or you may rather beguile yourself for a moment while I surrender to the remorseless ritual which these domestic conveniences demand from us . . . yes, here is our dear Arnold Bennett's last . . .'

While Henry James was picking up book after book on the table and bumbling round them like a great irresolute bee, his housekeeper was tapping the floor with her foot.

'Mr. James, please,' she protested.

The great novelist seated himself at his desk and, pen poised above the notepaper, looked anxiously up at his housekeeper.

'How would you . . . how shall I address the apex of this pyramid . . . the . . . er . . . director of this magnificent display of co-operative energy?'

'Mr. James, just write the order please and the man will take it,' she almost pleaded.

'And what was the peculiar title of the condiment which we seek to import into this so humble corner of this vast London of ours, Mrs. Dash?'

'Mr. James, we were going to order six jars of that Oxford marmalade you liked.'

From the corner of my eye I watched the operation of writing that order as Henry James' pen advanced to the paper and drew back and advanced again, and again drew

back and then hovered above the notepaper, making a traceless pattern upon the air in a kind of sarabande to which the housekeeper's foot tapped quite out of time.

At last the pen descended upon the paper and the large angular script flowed across it. The six jars of marmalade were ordered, and with a sigh of exhaustion and relief Henry James came back to his guest, apologizing once more for the interruption and full of solicitude for the way I had been able to pass the time while the marmalade was being ordered.

Then he asked me about the novel I was going to write, and I had as I thought told him the theme of *Guy and Pauline*, but he said: 'I cannot admit that I am any nearer to knowing what your next book is going to be about, but I suppose that this was to be expected. I remember I once asked our dear George Meredith that very question and after a long and, as it no doubt seemed to him, ample reply he had told me precisely nothing.'

Just before I said farewell to Henry James on that October afternoon so many years ago, I told him it was my intention to revise and possibly rewrite altogether my novel *Carnival* in the light of my experience. He held up his hands in a wide gesture of dismay.

'You alarm . . . you . . . appal me with such news,' he declared, his large smooth face momentarily puckered with genuine distress. 'I once wasted ten . . . indeed, twelve precious years in foolishly supposing that in the light of experience I could grope my way towards a more . . . towards that always elusive . . . in short that I could add yet something to what, when it was written, I had given all that I could give at that time. Renounce this preposterous ambition of yours, my dear boy. You have been granted the boon which is all a novelist should beg for himself. You have been granted that boon with a generosity.

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beyond that accorded to any of your young contemporaries. You fling the ball up against the wall and it rebounds immediately into your hands. Whereas I . . .' he looked round that room in the flat from the windows of which one saw the river shimmering through a filigree of boughs now almost bare of leaves, 'whereas I fling the ball against the wall, when it rebounds not into my hands, but on to the next wall and from that wall to the next.' He followed with apprehensive glance the flight of that ghostly ball round the room. 'Until,' he concluded, 'at last it falls to the ground and dribbles very very slowly toward my feet, and I, all my old bones aching, stoop. and most laboriously pick it up.'

I am tempted to hope that one or two of the young writers of to-day who suppose that complicity and obscurity are admirable qualities in themselves may wonder if the Master himself would have applauded a deliberate cultivation of them.

## ‘Don Roberto’

\* ~~~~~ \*

I HAD my first sight of Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham at Oxford in a wet May half a century ago. It was at a party in the garden of the Provost at Worcester College. I was talking at the time to Miss Edith Craig, the daughter of Ellen Terry, and to the lady who under the pseudonym of Laurence Hope wrote the ‘Kashmiri Love Songs’. ‘Less than the dust beneath thy chariot wheel’ was one of them. Both Edith Craig and Laurence Hope were women of considerable personality, and the latter was a very handsome woman into the bargain, but when Cunninghame Graham walked across that lawn they became for a twenty-year-old undergraduate quite insignificant. I should like to add that when presently I was introduced to Cunninghame Graham, I was able to arouse his interest so much that on my asking him to contribute to the university review I was editing he was so touched by youth’s tribute as to assent with enthusiasm. In fact, his manner of polite *bauté* kept everybody so successfully at a distance (myself included) that I could not even tell him how much I admired and how much I had enjoyed the tale of his travels in Southern Morocco called *Mogreb el Acksa*. It had been published only five years earlier and it was already a scarce book; I counted myself lucky to have found a copy at one of the Oxford booksellers, for which I see from the pencilled price still visible above the book-plate I paid forty-five shillings even then. Harold Nicholson and I were discussing the business of growing old the other day in a broadcast, and we agreed that shyness was youth’s unkindest enemy.

If I had only been able to tell Cunninghame Graham, upon that showery afternoon of May half a century ago, that I had myself already travelled to Morocco eighteen months earlier and that the joy of his book for me was its magical power to reconjure what was then still a land as remote and romantic as any travelled by Marco Polo, I feel sure from my knowledge of him in later years that he would have responded to a young man's enthusiasm. As it was, almost a quarter of a century would elapse before we met again. Yes, I wish I had chosen a sentence almost at random from *Mogreb el Acksa* to let him see I knew what writing was.

'As the sun sank, the ochre-coloured earth began to glow, each stunted hill bush stood out and became magnified, the rose and purple streaks of light shifted and ran into each other, then faded into violet and pale salmon-colour haze and falling on snow-capped hills lighted them up, making these reverberate the light upon the rose-red walls and yellow towers, so that the castle seemed to burn, and the muezzin upon his tower appeared to call the faithful to their prayers from a red stalk of flame.'

As it fell out, Cunninghame Graham and I were one day to become intimate over Scotland, not Morocco. Our views about Scotland coincided exactly. Neither of us supposed for a moment that the heather was set alight with ease, but the result of the Glasgow University Rectorial in October, 1828, was such a shock to cautious opinion that we nearly did begin to dream dreams. In the spring of that year, a remarkable young student called John MacCormick, who at this moment twenty-four years later is himself Rector of Glasgow University, had suc-

ceeded in amalgamating the various associations in Scotland, which each in its own way was proclaiming the gospel of Home Rule, in a single body called the National Party of Scotland. In due course the Glasgow University Nationalist Association invited Cunninghame Graham to stand for the Rectorship as a Scottish Nationalist against the candidates of the three stereotyped political parties. The Conservatives put up the Prime Minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, then in his zenith, and the Liberals Sir Herbert Samuel. I forget who the Labour candidate was.

After making one of the last speeches in support of the Scottish Nationalist candidate at the Glasgow University Union a day or two before the election, I joined Cunninghame Graham himself in Edinburgh, where he was staying at the Caledonian Hotel. I might say here to people unfamiliar with Rectorial Elections that the candidates themselves never make a personal appearance on any platform. I told Cunninghame Graham that there was optimism in Glasgow about our putting up a good show; we should almost certainly beat the Labour man and some optimists even hoped Cunninghame Graham would poll almost as many votes as Sir Herbert Samuel. Anyway, he was safe to beat the Labour man. —I seem to recall now that he was Arthur Henderson. 'Poor Labour,' he sighed in courtly sympathy, for he with William Morris, John Burns, Keir Hardie and others had been a leader of the Labour movement once upon a time. Then we settled down to wait for the result. The telegram from Glasgow arrived just as people were coming into the lounge at the Caledonian for afternoon tea. My heart beat.

Cunninghame Graham held the envelope in his hand for a moment, and then opened it almost with the gesture of a Georgian Macaroni tossing back his ruffles and flirting with a lace handkerchief. He read the telegram and handed



it to me. 'Only sixty-six votes behind Baldwin,' he murmured, 'well, in the circumstances I think that is as good as a victory, better indeed because I shall escape the bore of having to prepare and deliver a Rectorial Address.' I was so excited by the news that I sent my bonnet whirling up to the roof of the Caledonian's lounge, and it barely missed obliterating an old Edinburgh lady's tea when it came down. Don Roberto preserved as much of his graceful nonchalance as he could, but there was on each cheekbone a flush of happy achievement; in all his long adventurous life he could not have enjoyed many moments so sweet as this.

A couple of nights later he and I appeared on the platform of St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, with the Duke of Montrose, Christopher Grieve or 'Hugh MacDiarmid' whose great poetry had played a vital part in the inspiration of the national resurgence, and finally young John MacCormick. When the huge gathering broke up, Cunningham Graham and I went off to have supper together at the St. Enoch's Hotel. There was nobody in the dining-room except ourselves, and the waiter was not over-enthusiastic about clearing a table already laid for breakfast and providing us with cold chicken and ham.

Under the emotion of the evening, which, however well he might conceal his own susceptibility to it, had deeply stirred him, the old man, for he was now in his seventy-seventh year, began to see at the tables round us the ghosts of his fellow adventurers in politics in the past. 'I remember sitting at that table one evening with John Burns just before the Trafalgar Square meeting in November, 'eighty-seven.' That meeting, owing to the foolish instructions to his constables of Sir Charles Warren, the Chief Commissioner of Police, had led to a riot. The Tory government then in power, frightened of Mr. Gladstone,

frightened of Parnell, and very frightened indeed of the unemployed, had tried to stop public meetings, and on Sunday, November 13, 1887, the police knocked about not only the demonstrators but many peaceful onlookers. Cunninghame Graham, leading a party into the arena, had been badly cut about the head by a truncheon, and although a Member of Parliament he was arrested, and had to serve about two months in Pentonville gaol with John Burns.

'And I used to sit at that table with Keir Hardie in the old days, when he and I were pleased if we could get an audience of two nurse-girls and a boy under a lamp-post. And that table over there in the corner . . . Parnell and I sat there in . . . I've forgotten the date.' Don Roberto mentioned several other names of bygone agitators, patriots and reformers, and I divined that he was asking himself if the great meeting at the St. Andrew's Hall that evening was a sign that his country was awake. He shrugged his shoulders and murmured something in Spanish.

We had a bad setback in the following January at a by-election in Midlothian when the Nationalist candidate forfeited his deposit. However, Don Roberto continued to put his eloquence at the service of his country, and if many people thought he was tilting at windmills that did not detract from the vigour of the tilting.

By this date he always used to learn his speeches beforehand and deliver them with gestures that were as good to look at as a portrait by Velasquez. Moreover, his voice was still as resonant as a much younger man's. It was usually my place to follow him on to the platform, and always his last action before appearing was to sweep his hair up from his forehead. Few people realize how dependent orators are upon their hair.

One evening at the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, when I had spoken with a good deal of passion, trusting for eloquence to the response of the audience, he said to me as we went off the platform together, 'Yes, you'll be able to do that till you're sixty. You won't be able to do it after that.' And for the last nine years I have never stepped on a platform without that warning from Edinburgh still in my ears, and without an apprehension that suddenly in the middle of my speech I shall find myself unable to say another word, and that, retiring in mortification, from the public view, I shall be confronted by the stern form of Don Roberto and hear him say, 'I told you so.'

I can never understand why Don Roberto was regarded as such an extremist. I suppose it was his logical Latin mind, for claimant though he was to the two ancient Scottish earldoms of Glencairn and Menteith, and with the blood of how many romantic figures of the Scottish past in his veins, he always seemed more Spaniard than Scot. He had in fact a Spanish maternal grandmother with whom he spent much of his boyhood at Ryde. He looked at the future of Scotland with that logical Latin mind, and faced up to the fact that unless Europe could preserve the independence of her small nations Europe was doomed. All that has happened in the years since he died in 1836 justifies his most pessimistic expectations. He was willing to contemplate a separation between Scotland and England at least as complete as that between Ireland and England, but he did not desire so complete a separation and always hoped that Home Rule would not be denied too long, as it was to Ireland.

I remember a Royal lady's saying to me once that she was much interested in the revival of Scottish Nationalism but that she thought Mr. Cunninghame Graham and myself went too far. I replied that if he was always reported in

full Cunninghame Graham would not seem nearly so revolutionary, ‘And anyway, Ma’am,’ I added, ‘he’s much the most civilized revolutionist I know.’

It gave him a deal of generous pleasure when, three years after the fright he gave Mr. Baldwin, I was elected Rector of Glasgow University, and when a year later I was prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act Don Roberto was inclined to regard it as a dark manoeuvre to embarrass the cause of Scottish Nationalism. ‘I wish I could think it was, Don Roberto. But I’m afraid it’s nothing except hurt vanity, and the fear of being laughed out of their job if these war memories of mine are allowed to continue.’ He shrugged his shoulders with the contempt of a hidalgo. ‘Yes, yes, you’re probably right, Don Monti,’ which is what he always called me.

When the case was over he knew I was bound to be pretty hard up, and he offered me his house on the Isle of Bute for as long as I needed it for financial recuperation. However, I did not take advantage of his hospitality but retired to the Outer Hebrides to write a skit on counter-espionage, which he much enjoyed.

I was rather distressed to learn in 1894 that he had allowed himself to be nominated as the Nationalist Candidate for the Rectorship for the second time, because he was by then in his eighty-third year, and there was a long tradition that a Rectorial candidate never succeeded at the second time of standing. To my grief he was beaten. He took his defeat as one would expect with elegant philosophy. ‘Yes, the Rectorial election was a muddle,’ he wrote, ‘but—after all I suppose it has saved me a lot of worry. I remember that you had a great deal to do when you got in.’ As an afterthought he added to his letter, ‘I was in Spain all through the revolution, but fifty miles away from Oviedo which is now like Pompeii.’

In those last years Don Roberto found immense pleasure in his friendship with A. F. Tschiffely of the famous ride, and I am sure he much regretted that age prevented his riding through America on a similar adventure. He was greatly pleased when a new city in the Argentine was called after him, Don Roberto, and it was in Buenos Aires that on March 20, 1836, he died not long after attending the appropriate ceremonies. His body was brought back across the two Atlantics to lie beside his wife in the grave that thirty years before he had dug for her on Inchmahome; the isle in the Lake of Menteith, the isle where to-day some of the friends who had the privilege of speaking with him for the object nearest to his heart are speaking of him a hundred years after he was born.

I am glad that he was spared the beastliness of the Second World War in extreme old age. So ardent a spirit would have suffered intolerably during that protracted nightmare of the human soul. In the First World War he was able to revisit Paraguay where he was buying remounts for the British Government, but even if he had been young and active enough to take on such a job again it would not have been there for him. And he would not have enjoyed remounting tanks.

I remember when he and I were riding together one June in an ancient limousine at the tail of the procession through Stirling on a Bannockburn Day demonstration, he turned to me and said, 'You know, we both ought to have ridden to the field instead of crawling along in this abominable motor car. I suppose it would be damned hot walking up this hill.' 'It would indeed,' I said fervently. 'And don't forget we have to do a lot of spouting.' 'Yes, I suppose we'd better stay where we are, but, *caro amico*, we do look uncommonly like the end of a circus procession.'

I have said nothing about Cunninghame Graham as a

### 'DON ROBERTO'

writer of English prose, "because the way to appreciate that is to read his Morocco classic *Mograb el Acksa* and his short stories, at least one of which is among the very best in the English language. His knowledge of Spanish gave his prose, as it gave Hudson's, that Latin lucidity. I commend to young writers now under the influence of contemporary deliquescent North American prose an intensive study of W. H. Hudson and Cunninghame Graham.

We may call Don Roberto a happier knight errant than Don Quixote, for although he did not live to see his dreams for Scotland near to fulfilment he was spared much disillusionment. He wrote to me once about Prince Charles Edward: '*Povero Carluccio!* He should have died after he got back to Paris—perhaps murdered by a Hanoverian agent, or run away with by his horse and drowned in the Loire. Best of all killed by lightning, or he might have been killed fighting against the Turks.'

Yes, Don Roberto rides now his white steed with the Mexican saddle in Elysium's Rotten Row, a happy warrior.

# Royal Encounters

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IN the month of June, 1891, I was sitting by myself on the beach at Cromer making honeypots of the sand. This operation with bucket and spade was being performed rather painfully, because, having ripped up my right hand on a hook some weeks earlier, my arm was still in a sling; and the bucket had to be filled and emptied with my left hand.

‘That’s difficult, isn’t it?’ said a quiet voice.

I looked up at the lady in a beige-coloured coat of some silky, light material, who had been sitting on a camp-stool near me.

‘What have you been doing to your hand?’ this lady went on.

I gave her an account of the accident, and was able to add, with eight-year-old pride, that every morning and every evening my fingers had to be bent back to prevent their crumpling up.

‘It hurts most awfully,’ I added.

She murmured some words of sympathy, and then said it was time for her to go home. When she rose from the camp-stool, I was surprised to see how tall she was. ‘Good-bye,’ she said, a smile on her clear-cut face, that seemed like ivory. ‘I hope your hand will soon be better.’

Then she turned and walked toward the ramp that led up from the beach to the town. As she stepped over the sand with slow and stately tread, everybody on the beach looked round to stare at her.

‘What did she say to you?’ somebody was asking.

'Who?'

'The Empress of A<sup>u</sup>striä.'

I thought somebody was trying to be funny, and scowled. But it *was* the Empress of Austria. And I see still that tall and slim and graceful figure, and the smile on that clear-cut ivory face in the sunshine of a June morning, all but sixty years ago.

I am not certain of the next date, but it was probably September, 1893. One Saturday afternoon, I had been visiting a school-friend in Russell Road. As I reached the Hammersmith road, a carriage and pair suddenly pulled up by the kerb, and a footman in a long, scarlet coat jumped down from the box.

He took from his pocket one of those bulky collections—knives, corkscrew, and gimlet—treasured by schoolboys above most possessions, and, drawing back the curved implement which clasped the blades, he picked up the leg of the near horse and started to take a stone out of its shoe. I was watching the operation with absorbed interest, when I became aware that an old lady in the landau was bowing to me. So I bowed back. She was wearing a mushroom-shaped hat with a veil round it, and I suddenly realized that this was Queen Victoria herself. She continued to bow, and I kept pace with my own bows.

As I look back to the scene, I am not aware of any passers-by, but only of myself standing on the kerb and bowing to an old lady in a mushroom hat, and of an old lady bowing to me. Then, suddenly, the scarlet footman was finished with his task. I see him now climbing quickly back up on the box seat, and the carriage and pair driving off fast, toward Kensington High Street.

I remember how impatient I was for Monday to come that I might brag of this encounter with the Queen and of the bows addressed to myself. I was unaware, and so were



my school-fellows, when they exclaimed enviously, 'What a bung!' that an air-cushion was returning my homage.

On, now, to December, 1901. An undergraduate friend and myself were exploring the Royal Palace in Madrid, in tourist style, and, as we passed a doorway under an arch, there was a sound of leaping footsteps and excited laughter, and a fifteen-year-old boy crashed into us. His tutor, a grandee with up-turned, grey moustaches, held up both hands in a monitory gesture.

'I'm awfully sorry,' exclaimed the boy. 'Did I tread on your toe? I say,' he added quickly, 'would you like to see the armoury?'

And so my friend and I had the honour of being shown the armoury by the young King of Spain himself.

The next encounter I shall recall happened in Greece, some time in 1916, when I was presented to King Peter of Serbia, who was living in a house at Castella, between Phaleron and the Piraeus. He was then an old man. In attendance on him was a nurse, who, while the Serbian minister was translating my stilted remarks about the progress of the war, was reading to herself from what I thought was a yellow, French novel. When the King retired, she left her book on the chair, face downward, and followed him.

I had the curiosity to look at what she had been reading, expecting to find a novel by Gyp or Georges Ohnet. To my amazement it was Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*. I would never have dared invent such reading for a Greek nurse in attendance upon an old, infirm King.

And, now, on to Whitsun week in the fatal year 1939. For a reason which cannot be told now, Princess Hermine, the Kaiser's second wife, had expressed a wish to a German friend of mine that he should bring me to Doorn. We were given to understand that we must not expect to be

received by the Kaiser himself, and when we reached Amsterdam my friend was told on the telephone to arrive next day at five o'clock, but warned, once again, that we should not see the Emperor.

'We must arrive at the very minute,' my friend had insisted. 'The Kaiser insists on absolute punctuality.'

'But we're not going to see the Kaiser.'

My friend smiled and pointed to the heap of nursery-men's catalogues which he had collected at the Chelsea Flower Show.

'He will be glad to have these,' he told me.

When our credentials had been examined by the guards, we passed through the archway to the drive, and, as we came in sight of the house, which reminded me of some large house in East Anglia built in the days of William and Mary, we saw, coming along the wide, flagged path that led down to the drive through a formal Dutch garden, two figures.

'It is he,' said my friend. 'He certainly wants to meet you, for he has put on a suit of Harris tweed.'

And, sure enough, as the car stopped at the head of the flagged path, there was a gentleman in grey, Harris tweed, looking, apparently, much surprised when my friend jumped out of the car and clicked his heels in a low bow. He asked leave to present me, which was at once granted.

I was surprised to find the Kaiser so small a man: he could not have been more than five feet six inches; but he had the most vivid blue eyes I have ever seen, and they were very bright for a man of eighty.

In his tie he wore a miniature of the Black Eagle, attached to a tiny, black-and-white, silk bow.

My friend made haste to offer his catalogues.

'Ah, that's very kind—very kind,' the Kaiser rapped out

in a rather gruff staccato, and the slippery pile of paper was handed over to the equerry in attendance.

The conversation turned on gardening. The Kaiser asked how the evergreens in England had survived the hard winter.

'Has your Majesty tried our Scots fir here?' I asked. 'Pinus Sylvestris?'

'No, no,' he barked, 'no, I haven't, but, of course, I remember them so well at Balmoral . . . long ago.' And there was a moisture in those bright eyes, for the years between were rolling away and he was back in fancy in the heather of more than forty years earlier.

Then, quick to disguise his emotion, he said: 'Do you believe in the Loch Ness Monster?'

'No, Sir, I do not.'

'I'm glad to hear it. I believe it was a practical joke by the'—he paused for the briefest second—'by the gillies.' He was evidently delighted to have remembered a word he probably had not used since he was last at Balmoral, and for a while he kept bringing 'gillies' into the conversation.

At last he said:

'I believe the Empress is expecting you to tea. I must now take my afternoon walk. One of my gentlemen will show you round the garden afterwards.'

He turned abruptly and walked away very fast.

We had tea with the Princess in her boudoir—the walls crowded with pictures and silver-framed photographs in serried ranks everywhere, even on the grand piano. One picture was the original painting of the Kaiser in white uniform and breastplate and winged helmet, chromographically familiar to us for years. This hung above what looked to be the door of a cupboard, set in the wall.

There was a queer incident at tea.

The Princess was saying with a laugh:

'My boy has been getting into trouble with Goebbels over a lady, and he is now in prison for a few months.' And then she added passionately: 'Thank God it is not a concentration camp.'

As she spoke, the door opened and one of the white-jacketed servants came into the room to look round for a moment and go out again.

The Princess turned pale, and exclaimed hastily:

'But, of course, it is *very* exaggerated what people say about our concentration camps.'

She was evidently terrified by her indiscretion, for this white-jacketed flunkey, like all the rest of them in that exiled household, was a Nazi spy, and the Princess's fear was a depressing revelation of the German state of mind just before the war.

'After tea, when we were smoking those royal cigarettes—all cardboard holder, they seem—there was a rumble from what I had thought was a cupboard. The Princess threw away her cigarette and jumped up.

'It is the Emperor,' she exclaimed. 'He has come up by the lift.'

As she spoke the cupboard door opened, and there, framed in the entrance, stood that eighty-year-old, bearded, shrivelled emperor, almost, it seemed, at attention beneath the picture of himself in all his glory once upon a time. It was a fantastic contrast.

The Kaiser plunged forward into the room, formally saluting his wife on both cheeks (it was their first meeting that day), and turned to me:

'Yesterday must be Chestnut Sunday in Bushy Park,' he said. 'They will be wonderful in this weather. I remember them so well when I came to England for King Edward's funeral.'

He went on talking about trees for a while, then sud-

denly he shot round, and was out of the room before I could open the door for him.

'Did you see how moved he was?' the Princess asked, in obvious wonderment.

I made a courtier's reply.

'I was so much moved myself, Ma'am, that I did not notice.'

We talked for a little longer and then the Princess said we must see the rosarium: 'Baron von Dash, a gentleman of Mecklenburg, will show you everything.'

The Kaiser's rose-garden was as trim as Potsdam at its trimmest. Low chains were hung across various paths, *verboten* to any except His Imperial Majesty. Beyond the rosarium we came to a summer-house in the shape of a small, Greek temple. In it was a marble bench on which were two purple, velvet cushions embroidered with the Imperial monogram in gold.

On these cushions the Kaiser and Princess Hermine would sometimes sit and watch the children at play in a recreation ground of loose sand which the Kaiser had presented to the municipality of Doorn.

The rich gold of a May evening was gilding the great stable-yard where our car was waiting to take us back to Amsterdam. The gentleman of Mecklenburg clicked his heels and bowed farewell. Then the clock in the stable turret began to strike seven. Baron von Dash pulled out a large silver watch and looked at it in consternation; and as the car turned the corner we could see him running as hard as he could in the direction of the house.

'He is afraid he will be late for dinner,' said my friend with a smile. 'And the Kaiser insists on absolute punctuality.'

It was like the White Rabbit on his way to the Duchess's party.

## ROYAL ENCOUNTERS

I visited Doorn again a few days before the Germans invaded Poland. The Kaiser was laid up with gout. I sat for an hour on the balcony of the boudoir talking to the Princess. Below, beds of hot-coloured zinnias and red-and-yellow dahlias and scarlet salvias blazed in the August sun.

When I left Doorn, a company of Dutch soldiers were moving in to take up their quarters in the Orangery. In the big square at the Hague we stopped the car for a moment to look at the Palace of Peace. I wanted to have one last glance at the Rembrandts in the Mauritshuis Gallery. We were just too late. A cardboard placard was being hung up on the door, and on it was inked in sprawling, capital letters: 'Closed until Further Notice.'

# My Grandmother's Theatre Book

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THE book whose pages I am turning this evening is a quarto album bound in dark olive-green leather, and into it my grandmother stuck some of the letters she received from interesting people while she continued the management of the Lyceum Theatre after the death of my grandfather, H. L. Bateman, in 1875. To these letters she added some odds and ends from the past like the New Year's card she received in 1834 from Lucius Junius Booth, the English actor who settled in America and was the father of John Wilkes Booth, the fanatic assassin of Abraham Lincoln. My grandmother was then not quite eleven years old. She married at sixteen, an example her granddaughter, my sister Fay Compton, followed just over seventy years later. She was a playwright of some ability. One at least of her plays—'Self' it was called—was still being acted by stock companies in America fifty years after it was first produced. My grandfather, who was a Baltimore man, had been captivated by the genius of Henry Irving reciting Hood's poem, 'Eugene Aram', and it was under his management that the great actor first appeared as 'Hamlet'. His youngest daughter, my Aunt Isabel, was the Ophelia, being then sixteen. Later in life she became Mother General of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin at Wantage.

I turn the page and see a piece of paper folded in three. Inside is a spray of maidenhair fern above which is written in faded ink 'out of the dear Wales bouquet'. This is all that remains of the Prince of Wales's bouquet sent to the young American actress Kate Bateman, on her first appear-

ance in England as Leah and at the Haymarket Theatre in 1868. When my Aunt Kate and her young sister, Ellen, at the ages of eight and six, were filling the St. James's Theatre for a hundred nights in 1851 in scenes from Shakespeare, which they had already been doing for two years all over America, the Duchess of Sutherland had taken the two little girls to the Great Exhibition and presented them with two dolls—one a wax model of the Prince of Wales as a small boy in a sailor suit and the other of his sister the Princess Royal.

I turn the page and read:

19 Albert Gate,  
Knightsbridge

· Dear Sir,

I beg to acknowledge with thanks Mrs. Bateman's check £20, concluding Lyons Mail. May the King [of France] live for ever! Reade.

This was Charles Reade acknowledging a royalty cheque for *The Lyons Mail*, a play which was revived by H. B. Irving within the easy memory of many of you. The allusion to the King of France is to the forthcoming production of Boucicault's play *Louis XI* which succeeded *The Lyons Mail* in 1878. Charles Reade was an eccentric genius. In 1903 one could still see bits of looking-glass let in on either side of the fireplace in his old rooms in Magdalen College, Oxford. When he was a Fellow he had had the whole room covered with glass because he did not like people, but at the same time did not like being alone.

I turn the page and find a letter from Longfellow.



ECHOES

Cambridge, Massachusetts,  
March 10, 1860

Dear Madam,

I have had the honor of receiving your letter in reference to your dramatic version of 'Evangeline'. . . . So far as the theatrical representation goes neither I nor my publisher, have any objection to make. But we think there would be some objection to printing the play, as thereby our copyright might in some way be put in jeopardy.

Hoping that your dramatic version may have that success which I have no doubt it merits,

I remain,

Yours truly,

Henry W. Longfellow

What would a contemporary film producer say if an author wrote him a letter like that? Well, of course, he just wouldn't believe it was true.

On the other side of the Longfellow letter is one from Shirley Brookes, the Editor of *Punch*, regretting he cannot accept my grandfather's invitation to the party he always gave for Irving on his birthday, and wishing them all the merriest of merry *meetings* and drinkings. 'Meetings' is underlined to show the Editor of *Punch* was making a joke.

I turn over the pages and catch glimpses of signatures like Wilkie Collins and Holman Hunt, and come to a letter of April 1873 from William Frith the painter of 'Derby Day', at 7, Pembridge Villas, Bayswater.

'It was most kind of you to send me seats for 'Eugene Aram'. Like all the world I was more than delighted. You are a most fortunate man!—to have a daughter who can so truthfully portray the most difficult and the

subtlest emotion—an actor like Irving who has very seldom had his equal and a writer who fits the two with one of the most poetical dramas ever put upon the stage. Long may you continue to show your admirable power of setting such gems.'

Over the page to another painter—G. F. Watts declining an invitation to see *Eugene Aram*.

'I suffer so much from rheumatism in my head that I am afraid of any exposure to draughts and consequently have given up going anyw' ere at all not only in the evening but any time and to any place.'

Watts was then fifty-six. No wonder his young wife, Ellen Terry, ran away from Little Holland House.

The play of *Eugene Aram* was written by W. G. Wills who also wrote *Charles I* and 'I'll Sing thee Songs of Araby'. My grandfather, worried lest Lord Lytton should be jealous for his successful novel *Eugene Aram*, asked him what he felt about it. Lord Lytton's reply came from Torquay on Christmas Eve 1872—not a month before his death.

'In the first place accept for yourself and your gifted daughter my best wishes for the Season. May the New Year add to you all happiness and public prosperity and success . . . with regard to a play founded on the story of *Eugene Aram* I should not have the smallest right to object to any dramatist treating it at his will provided he does not take characters, incidents, situations as well as language invented by myself. If he do so borrow from me, however partially, then I should like to see the MS. of his drama, not otherwise.'

## ECHOES

The next letter, written with purple ink on black-edged notepaper is from Lewis Carroll.

Ch. Ch. Oxford

Nov. 23, '73

I have had much pleasure in writing my name in the two volumes according to your wishes.

Mr. Dubourg interested me much by what he told me of your idea of the possibility of dramatising one or other of the two 'Alices'. I hope that, while dissuading you from entertaining the idea at present, he expressed to you, as fully as I did to him, my sense of the compliment paid me by your having thought of it. . . .

Believe me,

Very truly yours,

C. L. Dodgson

I pass over several letters to read some extracts out of one from that remarkable woman, Julia Margaret Cameron, who took up photography at the age of fifty and in my opinion as a recorder of men and women has never been excelled before or since. She has been to see a performance of *Charles I* in which my Aunt Isabel played Henrietta Maria.

'I cannot tell you how much I admired her pathetic acting. It seems a strange praise—but that there was nothing theatrical in her whole conduct of her part delighted and surprised me not a little. Madame Malibran who was one of the stars of my early days had the gift of making reality of life stronger in her simplicity of acting than by dramatic effect. The Queen and King Charles dissolved the whole heart of the Public into tears. I very much appreciate this reserve of power in

MY GRANDMOTHER'S THEATRE BOOK

everything—in painting, in poetry, in acting. It does not *seize* hold of the public but it takes hold I hope!

Criticism like that foreshadows the taste of the next generation.

Another who enjoyed *Charles I* with qualifications was Anthony Trollope. He writes to my grandmother on January 8, 1873, from 3 Holles Street beneath the crest of a bounding scarlet stag with a leaf in its mouth.

‘I went with my wife the other day to see *Charles I* and was very much pleased indeed. I thought Isabel very lovely, and perfectly dignified in her bearing when passionate as well as when angry or playful.

The King was better than I had expected—very good occasionally—but with some terrible lapses. The Cromwell I certainly did not like.’

I turn the page.

Farringford,  
Freshwater,  
Isle of Wight,  
Jan. 7, 1876

Dear Mrs. Bateman,

By all means let me see the book again. Some of the changes of scene were only jotted down in the moment and might I daresay be improved.

Yours very truly,  
A. Tennyson

And then a postscript:

‘Do you think *all* the changes good?’

I doubt if any changes could have turned *Queen Mary* into a successful play for the stage, but it is amusing to find the reputedly formidable Tennyson inquiring so tentatively about the changes of scene proposed for the Lyceum production.

The next scrap of interest is a page torn from one of the Confession Albums that were so popular in the 'seventies. James McNeil Whistler is in the box. He declares that his favourite name is Maria, his favourite colour Payne's Grey, flower Calceolaria, occupation Whittling, recreation Church and the Royal Academy, study Brown, poet Mrs. Barbourd, prose writer Dr. Blair, religious prose writer Solomon, novelist Ouida, character in history Mazeppa, fictitious character George Washington, public character the Bailiff, speaker in Parliament The Speaker, French author Mme. de Stael, religious work Sir Joshua Reynolds, musical composer Sankey, virtue Modesty, and being called upon to name the vice he most dislikes plumps for Prevarication.

The next letter is more remarkable for the heading of the notepaper than its contents. Grange Mount, Upper Norwood, in blue Gothic letters, with gilt capitals which still gleam over seventy years later, a tribute to the stationery. In the left-hand corner the initials S.R. form a monogram intertwined with leaves and flowers and on top sits a perky jay in its natural colouring. This is the notepaper of J. Sims Reeves the great tenor.

A letter from George Augustus Sala written in Indian ink in an obviously cultivated script is typical of the super-journalist.

46 Mecklenburgh Square, W.C.

Tuesday, March Fifth 1878

My dear Mrs. Bateman,

I happened to meet H. Irving [his first Irving did not satisfy Sala so he crossed it out and wrote it again] at the Tennyson-Locker wedding in Westminster Abbey last Thursday, and telling him that I had heard from you and that I was about to write to you saying how glad I should be to come to the First Night of *Louis XI* he said, 'Then you needn't write: I shall see Mrs. Bateman anon, and will give her your message.'

But great artists have short memories and perhaps H.I. forgot to give you my message. In any case it is safer to write to say that I am very anxious to come on Saturday, and that I am very grateful to you for your kind remembrance of a very old friend.

Faithfully yours always,

George: Augustus: Sala

and an elaborate squiggle after it.

I have no time to quote from many other letters—among them George du Maurier, Robert Browning, Charles Dickens the younger, Tom Hughes of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the painters, Alma-Tadema, Luke Fildes, Frederick Leighton, and that same Duchess of Sutherland who had given those two little girls their dolls twenty-seven years earlier and who now wanted a box for *Louis XI*.

But I have just time for Taglioni's protest against signing that Confession Album. The most absolute of all prima ballerinas was then twenty-four, and she was teaching deportment in London, having to earn her living. She once told my mother that her father kept her on her

## ECHOES

toes as a little girl with a horsewhip. She writes in French in a fine script. I will translate:

'Album! What a frightening word! I tremble, when somebody comes up to me and says, "Will you write something on a page of my album", and to the request I always reply, "non, certes, je n'écirai rien".'

So the great dancer's favourites are not recorded. Only her signature . . .

Marie Taglioni.

Douarière Comtesse Gilbert des Voisins.

After my grandmother gave up the Lyceum lease to Irving she took Sadler's Wells, spent a great deal of money on improving it, and died in 1881 before she was able to reap the benefit.

# Going to the Pantomime

\* \* \* \* \*

THE first pantomime to which I was taken was *The Forty Thieves* at Drury Lane matinée in January 1887 when I was on the edge of four years old. I remember that long journey by District Railway from Kensington to the Temple, the fresh air of the Embankment when one emerged from the choking fumes of the underground, the adventurous crossing of the Strand, the rather frightening walk through the narrow thronged streets round Drury Lane, long since cleared away, the orange girls crying their wares in the colonnade as they had cried them since the days of Nell Gwynn. Then the sight of the crowded auditorium from a box in the dress-circle tier on the O.P. side—that is on the left as you look at the stage—the unforgettable pantomime smell of the past, a mixture of gas, oranges, human beings and dust, the noise of excited children and grown ups in the gallery and upper boxes (as the upper circle was called then), in pit and stalls and dress circle, and in the private boxes too, and finally the great gasp of anticipation as the curtain rose on the immemorial first scene of the Demon King announcing his villainous projects by the illumination of fizzy blue and red limes until the Fairy Queen entered from the prompt side and, standing in the holy circle cast by a fizzy white lime, vowed she would thwart his villainy. It was in one of those Drury Lane pantomimes of about sixty years ago that the Demon King sang:

*Hush, bush, bush!*  
*Here comes the bogey man,*



## ECHOES

*Be on your best behaviour,  
For be'll catch you if he can.*

At these words children were fain to clutch parent or nurse or governess in panic, and I remember hearing it debated whether a theatre management was justified in terrifying children with such songs at a pantomime. Can you fancy children being terrified by such a song to-day?

My most vivid memory of *The Forty Thieves* is when Charles Lauri, as a donkey, and Paul Martinetti, as a monkey, climbed up from the stage to the boxes on the prompt side and ran, yes, ran all the way round the plush-covered parapet of the dress circle, raising shrieks from all the children in the front rows. When the two animals reached our box my young brother—still four months away from two—let out a yell so loud and continued to yell so loudly that our nurse had to take him out of the box; I was left alone, a rather apprehensive child, for the rest of the scene.

The Drury Lane pantomime in 1888 was *Puss in Boots*, and for me it was a tragedy because just as Letty Lind, the principal girl, came on in a coach and Charles Lauri, as the enterprising cat, was crying that his master the Marquis of Carrabas was drowning, my nurse suddenly decided that it was time to go home. We were in a circle box on the prompt side—she, an elderly woman who looked like a withered Chinese, a little girl friend, and myself. I implored Nanny to stay, but she insisted on leaving the theatre. At the time her behaviour was inexplicable; I realized later that she must have been seized by an overwhelming desire to get back to the gin which she imbibed for years before she was found out. I can hear now from long ago the echoes of my sobbing as I was led from the theatre, and I can see now through the

glass doors of the circle lobby with a last despairing backward glance the glittering silver of Letty Lind's coach.

The pantomime of 1889 was the first in which the immortal Dan Leno appeared at Drury Lane. He played the Baroness in *The Babes in the Wood*. The laughter at his entrance, wheeling on the Babes—Herbert Campbell and Harry Nicholls—in a huge perambulator resounds in my ears from over sixty years ago. *Jack and the Beanstalk* followed in 1890. Harriet Vernon, a very handsome woman not far from six foot tall, was Jack, and I fell madly in love with her, being then on the edge of seven. When we got home from the matinée, I announced my intention of marrying her one day. 'You won't,' proclaimed my brother, four months away from five. 'I'm going to marry her.' In a trice we were locked in a furious duel, rolling over and over one another on the front door mat like a couple of cavemen. In the end, with the advantage of weight, I compelled my brother to renounce his ambition to marry Harriet Vernon.

By this date the Harlequinade had shrunk to a couple of scenes: no longer did the Clown go right through the pantomime as in the days of Grimaldi. At the end of what was called the Transformation Scene, which consisted of raising one by one a series of gauzes to reveal fairies, reclining in enormous roses and water-lilies and that kind of thing, Clown, Pantaloon, Columbine and Harlequin appeared, the Clown opening with the time-honoured greeting of 'Here we are again!' and proceeding to throw crackers to the children in the audience—often able to reach as far as the dress circle, which was a pretty good throw from the stage at Drury Lane. This was followed by a front-cloth street-scene in which the Clown always burnt everybody with a red-hot poker and always stole a string of sausages from a butcher's shop. Columbine was

continually pirouetting backwards and forwards along the street and Harlequin playing all sorts of tricks on shop-fronts with his wand. The Pantaloon and a gawky Policeman were always the butts of every joke and they were always being burnt more than anybody else by the Clown's red-hot poker. Then the street-scene gave way to an interior which ended in a riotous trap-act with Harlequin whizzing up ten feet in the air through a star-trap and diving head foremost through a wall just as the Clown was going to catch him. That second scene vanished early in the 'nineties, and by the beginning of this century nothing was left of the Harlequinade except a brief street-scene. In a few years or so even that vanished, and the Harlequinade, as far as I know, is now extinct.

For the Drury Lane pantomimes of 1890 and 1891 we had the stage-box on the prompt side. In those days the stage-box was behind the orchestra and actually flush with the front of the stage—a most exciting place to be. I remember Marie Lloyd singing and dancing 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay'—no, not Lottie Collins who sang and danced it at the music-halls—and, while she was high-kicking from a cloud of amber underclothes, Harry Payne, the last of the great clowns, came into our box all dressed to go on and cry 'Here we are again' when his cue came. That seemed the most tremendous encounter I had ever had with the great of this world. If Dick Barton stepped out of a loudspeaker and shook hands all round the room it would hardly provide a greater thrill for a boy of to-day.

Other pantomimes we used to visit in those far off days were at the old Surrey Theatre in the Blackfriars Road. It was a great adventure walking over the bridge from the underground station, and as I look back to the Thames as it then appeared to my childish eyes it seems rather larger than the Atlantic Ocean. The giant Blunder-

bore was a formidable figure in *Jack the Giant Killer*, for he was able to put his head into the two circle-boxes on either side of the proscenium and champ at us, and in *Valentine and Orson* the fight between the two brothers spilt so much red paint that the stage looked like the floor of a slaughter-house. Nowadays the psychosis ramp would attribute the most fearful consequences to a childhood exposed to such horrors, but I cannot say I have discovered any psychosis in myself.

It was in the mid 'nineties that the great boom in building suburban theatres was in full swing. Most of them are picture palaces to-day or, like the Grand Theatre, Fulham, empty and silent. Pantomimes there were almost our favourites, in spite of having to endure the spectacle of a little boy in an Eton collar standing up in the dress circle to sing a duet with Aladdin or Prince Charming. How we loathed that little boy! I remember one song which went:

*Your lips are red as rubies,  
Your eyes are diamonds rare.  
So while I have you,  
My lovely Sue,  
I'm as rich as a millionaire.*

While this odious little boy was singing his part Aladdin would go mincing about the stage, holding her hand to her ear—or I suppose I should say *his* hand, because she was the principal boy, and to our consternation and disgust we could hear elderly women all round exclaiming, 'Oh, what a little love! Oh, isn't he lovely! Oh, I do think he's lovely.' We used to scowl our disagreement, but it was no use. To that audience of long ago this chorister was another Stewart Granger or Michael Wilding.

## ECHOES

Those were the days when the telephone was still a novelty and Millie Legarde sang:

*Hello, my baby, bello, my boney,  
Hello, my ragtime girl.  
Send me a kiss by wire,  
Honey, my heart's on fire,  
If you refuse me, boney, you'll lose me  
Then you'll be left alone.  
So telephone, and tell me I'm your own.*

We thought that this lyric touched the ultimate heights of passionate expression. To sing 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' or 'My love is like a red, red rose' after that would have seemed a descent to utter banality.

There were great houses for pantomime before the eruption of suburban theatres. The Grand, Islington, with Harry Randall as the Dame, the Standard, Shoreditch, and—more tremendous than any—the Britannia, Hoxton. If I were asked to name the audience that expressed beyond any other the spirit of London I would say the audience of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, at a pantomime. This was the apotheosis of the Cockney. This was the incarnation of his humour and gaiety and warm humanity. The women in their plumed hats! The costers in their pearlyies! The oranges and nuts! That immense audience would seethe with enjoyment: it was a vast bubbling kettle of mirth. This was the stuff out of which came the London able to 'take it' forty years on. I used to have tears in my eyes just from the pleasure of being one in such a gathering. The man who was never one of an audience at the Britannia, Hoxton, has missed something in the life of London.

# Delights of Old Sweets

\* ~~~~~ \*

IN these memories of past pleasures I try not to sound too much of a praiser of what was at the expense of what is. Old songs, old plays, old dances, old omnibuses, they were very good, but no doubt the present can provide as good. There is, however, one thing which I shall without hesitation declare positively is inferior to-day: the sweets. Of course they have had to contend with the effect of two great wars on the distribution of sugar, but the chief cause for the deterioration in flavour is the use of so much synthetic flavouring. If anybody tried to convince me that imitation vanilla is as good vanilla as that which comes from the black, glossy pod of the lovely plant itself, he will waste his breath. And if anybody tries to convince me that imitation cream is as good as real cream . . . no, no, let us face it, nobody to-day knows what a real vanilla ice tastes like.

There are a few expensive sweet shops left in places like Bond Street, but the sweet shop of my youth which was found in the smallest village has vanished.

I think of one in the 'nineties, kept by three elderly sisters in the Hammersmith Road. They were gloomy women, all with moustaches and more than a hint of beards. I used to suppose it was those moustaches which made them gloomy, but I realize now that it must have been the irritation caused by the inability of their youthful customers to decide how to invest a penny. It must have been exasperating to take down glass jar after glass jar and always be asked for another one, or to have to wait five minutes while a small boy tried to make up his

mind whether he would invest a penny in a bar of raspberry, greengage, or apricot noyau. Noyau! Does noyau exist anywhere to-day, even if only flavoured with synthetic fruit? It was made of crushed almonds packed between that edible paper you get underneath macaroons. I should add that noyau was a second-best to nougat, and nougat may still be obtainable, though I shudder to think what its price may be to-day. It was sold in small slabs at threepence and sixpence in my youth, and it was only when one was tipped half-a-crown by some elderly friend of the family that nougat became a feasible purchase. Sticks of licorice at four a penny were a more likely investment. I wonder why we liked licorice so much, when one of the most detestable medicines inflicted on us was licorice powder? Ugh! Not quite so noisome as Dr. Gregory's vile manipulation of rhubarb, but disgusting enough. At the end of the nineteenth century children were still at the mercy of the Victorian theory that the nastier the medicine was to the palate of youth, the more beneficial were its effects.

A penny an ounce, two ounces a penny, and four ounces a penny: those were the stock prices. We had to be pretty short of pocket money to invest in the last, which were a foretaste of most of the sweets of to-day for which probably fourpence is now charged for a single ounce. The fruit gums at two ounces a penny were about the same as the fruit gums obtainable to-day. But if you could afford fruit gums at a penny an ounce, then you had fruit gums of a quality you could not buy anywhere to-day—lemon, lime, orange, pear, apple, strawberry, raspberry, apricot, all tough gums, with greengage and blackcurrant both soft. Here is a story of those penny-an-ounce fruit gums to show what children were prepared to endure to satisfy their craving for sweets.

It was a habit in our house to present my younger brother, my young sister, and myself on a fine holiday with the money to buy return tickets to Richmond that we might spend our time in the park. As I remember, a return cost fivepence in the mid-'nineties: that meant one and threepence between us.

One day I suggested that instead of going to Richmond we should invest the money in buying fifteen ounces of those fruit gums. The suggestion was approved, and with almost a pound of fruit gums to share we emerged from the sweetshop apprehensively lest we should meet anybody we knew, and proceeded to wander surreptitiously about the least frequented streets on the very outskirts of West Kensington to eat those fruit gums. I had worked out that to pass the three hours we should normally spend before apparently returning from Richmond to five o'clock tea we could allow ourselves three gums every five minutes. Oh, how bored we were before we had finished that afternoon! Ishmael would have found the most arid parts of the desert less monotonous than we found the hot pavements of those deserted streets. Moreover, we discovered to our astonishment that it was possible to grow tired of fruit gums. The only relief obtainable towards the end of that three hours was quarrelling over our favourite soft greengage and blackcurrant gums, which ran out first in the allotment of shares. We were so replete with gums, boredom, and fatigue that the account we gave our governess of the wonders of Richmond Park lacked epic fire. The experiment was not repeated.

The sweets which have remained least changed by modern conditions are chocolate creams, and I would not claim for the chocolate creams of yesterday any superiority over the best chocolate creams of to-day. Yet there was one exquisite flavour which has vanished, and that was



wallflower. If I were asked to name one perfect moment in youth, I believe I would choose a gala night of fireworks in the Spa Gardens at Scarborough with a thirteen-year-sweetheart and between us a quarter of a pound of wallflower-flavoured chocolate creams to be munched while rockets and tourbillons lighted the serene August sky with crimson, emerald, and gold.

A year or two ago I was being shown over a large chocolate factory, one of the most famous in the country, and I asked the manager why wallflowers were no longer used to flavour chocolate creams. 'Wallflowers?' he exclaimed in surprise. 'Well, I've been here for nearly twenty-five years and I don't remember that flavouring ever being used.' I told him about the Scarborough of over fifty years ago, but I could see he believed I was imagining that flavour and tactfully changed the subject. About a fortnight later I received a letter from that manager to say that on a forgotten shelf in the factory he had discovered a bottle of the essential oil of wallflowers with just enough left in it to flavour a couple of pounds of chocolate creams, and that to show his regret for doubting my memory he was sending me that couple of pounds in the hope that they would give me as much pleasure as once upon a time. And as I ate those chocolate creams I was thirteen years old again and the rockets were lighting up with emerald and crimson the calm glimmering sea beyond the Spa at Scarborough, and my thirteen-year sweetheart and I were eating those wallflower creams together.

There was one sweet at a penny an ounce which we never regarded as too extravagant, and those were gelatine lozenges. They were thin round discs one of which could be safely sucked in class without the least fear of being discovered, and without the discomfort of a burnt almond

or bull's eye hastily swallowed when called upon to construe out of one's turn by a suspicious master. Gelatine lozenges were useful in other ways. One could use them to stick the lid of some too industrious schoolfellow's desk so that when opened it would hold and then suddenly fly up and with any luck catch him a sharp blow on the chin. Even the moustachioed old ladies who kept that sweet shop found a use for gelatine lozenges by turning them into rivets for a cracked glass jar.

I suppose acid drops are still obtainable. I think they must be because they often appear in crossword puzzles. I had a frightful experience with an acid drop once. I saw to my delight a stray acid drop on the mantelpiece of the night nursery and had just popped it into my mouth when my old nurse appeared in the door and in my alarm at being caught out in the offence of what the catechism called 'picking and stealing' I swallowed the acid drop. I thought I had set myself on fire, for it was not an acid drop at all but a morsel of camphor.

At Colet Court once upon a time the tuckshop was what must once have been the potting shed of a big garden belonging to a house in the Hammersmith Road. The house was empty and was reputed to be haunted. I imagine this tale was deliberately put about by the school authorities to protect the house against mischievous exploration. Anyway, we never ventured even as far as the other end of the garden from the tuckshop. When the older boys had made their purchases in the eleven o'clock break they were always assailed by a crowd of small boys screaming '*Donnez, donnez*' as persistently as beggars on the platform of an Indian railway-station. Why the use of French to beg for a sweet should confer upon the beggars the privilege of making a pest of themselves is one of those insoluble mysteries of prep-school ethics. But so it was,

and the horrid little brats would do quite well out of us. I used to buy a detestable sweet called hundreds-and-thousands, which consisted of minute, crudely coloured, sweet pellets no larger than a pin's head and of which one was given two ounces for a halfpenny. I used to put a pinch of these into the grubby palm of some small boy squealing '*Donnez*' and eat my own satin pralines or bar of apricot noyau in peace.

Caramels! Let it be admitted at once that caramels gave you as good a run for your money as any sweet. Indeed, better than any except the gelatine lozenge. But when I consider the risk of discovery involved in chewing gently upon a caramel during the exposition of a knotty passage of Thucydides I marvel at our audacity. To start with, the laborious process of divesting the caramel of its waxed paper covering was a challenge to fortune. Then if that was accomplished and the caramel was safely inside one's mouth, the next ten minutes were fraught with peril, because if suddenly called upon to answer a question it might easily happen that the jaws at that moment were locked by the caramel. And should the master demand sternly if you had a sweet in your mouth you could not gulp it down as you could by an effort a peppermint bull's eye or a burnt almond, however painfully. You had to submit to the humiliating business of removing the glutinous mess from your mouth, and, amid the grins of your fellows, wrapping it up in paper and depositing it in the waste-paper basket.

Nevertheless, the risk was worth it, and when I think of how much of Cicero's prosing about friendship or old age was sweetened by the subtle flavour of those caramels of once upon a time, I salute them, and envy not the youth of to-day its chewing-gum.

# Old Omnibuses

\* \* \* \* \*

How absurd it would have seemed to me as a schoolboy if I had been told that sixty years later I should be looking back to horse-omnibuses with as much romantic regret as, when I *was* a schoolboy, I used to envy Tom Brown's journey to Rugby by stage-coach. At my prep. school, Colet Court, the chief excitement we felt about omnibuses was whether they belonged to the London General Omnibus Company or to the London Road Car Company. The latter flew a little Union Jack on a small pole stuck in a socket in the right-hand corner of the front of the omnibus. Once upon a time the flag had carried the motto 'No Monopoly'; that was in the days when the London General Omnibus Company had tried to keep a new rival company off its routes. Partisanship used to provide (and I am sure it still does) a keen emotion for small boys. Just as we were Oxford or Cambridge, so we were either Road Car or General, and I, being a Road Car supporter, would have walked all the way to Kensington Gardens rather than mount an omnibus belonging to the opposition company.

I might add that the Road Car supporters were allied with the District Railway, and the opposition with the Metropolitan Railway. I can recall now the feeling of hostility with which I used to pass High Street Kensington Station, which belonged to the latter: to me the Inner Circle savoured of Dante's Inferno. What fun it was to ride on the top of a Road Car bus armed with peashooters and shoot up the passengers on the outside of a General while the drivers raced one another along the Hammer-

smith Road! The very horses themselves seemed to enjoy the sport as their hooves thudded on the wooden pavement of the road. I still have a picture in my mind's eye of those passengers under fire, holding the collars of their greatcoats over their ears, their heads bent low.

The Hammersmith omnibuses were red, a much more honest kind of pillar-box red than that of the motor-buses of to-day, which pervade London and its suburbs with a monotony of the wrong shade of red. No doubt it is more economical to paint every omnibus the same colour, but the loss to London's colour of once upon a time has been acute in spite of the aniline dyes which have made so many of its windows crudely bright to-day. From Hammersmith Broadway to St. Mary Abbot's, off Kensington High Street, meant a white penny ticket; to Sloane Street a blue twopenny ticket; to Piccadilly Circus a pink threepenny ticket. Ultima Thule was attainable with sixpence, but I do not remember where that was for I never travelled to such an unimaginable distance east. We could ride home either in a red Hammersmith bus or on the blue and chocolate bus that took the left-hand fork at Sloane Street down the Brompton Road and finally by a rather roundabout route finished at the Cedars Hotel, West Kensington, for our house was equidistant from either. Beyond the Cedars, at the corner of North End Road, in those days there was a row of country cottages, and all round were houses in large gardens where to-day is a huddle of gaunt flats. The Grange is still there without most of its garden, but I hear they want to pull it down. Samuel Richardson once lived in this old house, and in my boyhood Burne-Jones lived there. Never mind. Pull it down. It will only be carrying on the persistent tradition of vandalism all over London since the First World War.

There was an exciting omnibus of a shade between

ultramarine and prussian blue which arrived from somewhere beyond Redcliffe Gardens by way of Earls Court and went up Church Street, Kensington, to a *terra incognita* beyond Notting Hill Gate. It was an exciting omnibus because, when it reached St. Mary Abbot's, a third horse was attached to enable it to take the slope of Church Street without slackening speed. That third horse, the cock horse, was always ridden by a boy, much, we thought, to be envied.

The omnibus along the old Roman road from the west that led through Bayswater to Oxford Street and Holborn was green, a pleasant shade of green that matched the verdure of Hyde Park. There was another green omnibus which started from King's Cross, and reached Piccadilly Circus by way of Bloomsbury and Long Acre. Then it went to Sloane Street, down which it turned, and I believe finished its adventurous and serpentine course somewhere on the other side of Vauxhall Bridge. This green bus bore the name neither of the London General nor the London Road Car Companies, but of Thomas Tilling, and Mr. Thomas Tilling was the grandfather of Mabel Constanduros. In my boyhood I used to think that to own green buses like Mr. Tilling was the pinnacle of life's accomplishment. I felt sure that Mr. Tilling would never have allowed pirate buses on his route. Oh yes, pirate buses were a feature of London life once upon a time. They were particularly active on the route taken by the red Hammersmith buses. I have already said that I was a devoted adherent of the Road Cars, and so, when, after a *matinée* on Saturday afternoon, I would be waiting with my ancient nurse for a bus at Piccadilly, I would always tug at her arm when she was proposing to get aboard an omnibus without that Union Jack. On one occasion she declared she had no patience with my fads and fancies and

she insisted on mounting a bus without a flag. The conductor did not come for the fares until we were past Sloane Street, and then, when my nurse proffered the sixpence for our two threepenny fares, instead of producing the pink tickets, he growled: 'A shilling.' 'A shilling?' she gasped. 'Or I set you down right away,' he threatened. And she had to pay to avoid the indignity of being turned off the bus.

To find yourself on a pirate bus was faintly alarming, but I remember something even more alarming, and that was in the drenching, dreary November of 1888, when I suddenly read with a thrill of horror on the list of fares at the end of the bus the ominous word 'Whitechapel'. Whitechapel, where Jack the Ripper was murdering people every evening! Suppose that we should be carried on past friendly Piccadilly to Whitechapel! 'Don't keep fidgeting with the straw,' I was adjured by my ancient nurse. In cold weather it was the custom to cover the floor of the inside of a bus with straw to produce for the passengers an illusion of comfort.

'This bus goes to Whitechapel, Nannie,' I gulped in dread. I was probably told not to behave so old-fashioned, which was Nannie's disapproving epithet for fears like mine, but how glad I was when we got out at Regent Street that afternoon!

There was a wonderful bus that went down Regent Street called the Atlas. The driver sat under an enormous umbrella, which sheltered him and the four passengers who had climbed up to sit beside him on the box seat. The other passengers on top sat back to back on a long knifeboard seat. Alas, by the time I was old enough to climb up and sit beside the driver of an Atlas bus, that unusual vehicle had vanished. From Victoria station I recall an omnibus of deepest mulberry called Monster.

This was the Monster public house of Pimlico, a corruption, I believe, of the monastery that once occupied the site. Whitehall and Charing Cross Road were gay with vivid yellow omnibuses, which went on down Tottenham Court Road and one of which finished at the Archway Tavern, Highgate. Chelsea and Putney were both served by white omnibuses. One might fancy that a white omnibus would have looked dingy in that smokier London of fifty years ago. But no, those white omnibuses always looked nearly white.

Once upon a time the various colours of the omnibuses achieved the same kind of significance that a national flag possesses. Suddenly to see a red Hammersmith bus in the far east of London was like a sight of the Red Ensign in an Oriental harbour. To us, familiar with the south side of Kensington Gardens, people who lived in Bayswater and rode in green omnibuses seemed as far away as Ireland, while the white-bused residents of Putney had a kind of polar remoteness. G. K. Chesterton wrote an enchanting fantasy about that balkanized London of sixty years ago. I wish I could have had the pleasure of reading *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* when I was at my prep. school, but G. K. himself had hardly stopped trudging daily to St. Paul's School across the road, and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* was still ten years from being written.

Of course it was always the aim of every boy to ride outside on an omnibus and if he could find himself in one or other of the front seats and be talked to by the driver his contentment was absolute.

'Now then, old rags and bones, where do you think you're going with that Derby Winner of yours?' That was the kind of question a bus-driver would shout down to an elderly driver of a four-wheeler who was obstructing the road. Sometimes, of course, the driver of an omnibus



would get involved with the driver of a hansom and then it was anybody's game, because the hansom could usually give as good as it got.

If one was compelled by nurse or governess to ride inside an omnibus, the objective was the far end of the crimson plush seat where windows on either side of the tariff of fares looked out on the horses, horses as sleek and well-groomed as any in the state-coach of a Duke. If one failed to get that corner, one had to console oneself with the advertisements. There was one advertisement which always fascinated me particularly. It was a transparency in colour stuck upon the glass. A dignified gentleman in a full-bottomed white wig, described as an eminent Q.C., was sitting at table eyeing an elderly bearded gentleman who was asking him what he thought of his Pyretic Saline. To which the eminent Q.C. was replying: 'It is my fixed and deliberate opinion after many years' experience that for keeping the head cool, the mind clear, and the body in health, there is nothing to equal Lamplough's Pyretic Saline!'

There must have been many omnibuses of every colour imaginable that I never saw in my youth, and it is a pity that no record of them exists. We took them for granted, and then they vanished like autumn leaves. I wish the colours of those old omnibuses could be preserved by some topographer of London, but I doubt if that can be done now. A book should have been written about them before the motor-omnibuses drove them from the scene. I had the melancholy pleasure about a year ago of writing a letter to *The Times* to rebuke, more in sorrow than in anger, some high-up official of London Transport who had talked about the white omnibuses that used to go along the Bayswater Road. The Napoleon of Notting Hill would have made short work of that official!

# The China Cockatoo in Piccadilly

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I HAVE two particular memories of Piccadilly. I remember clearly my first ride on the top of a bus from Kensington to Piccadilly at the age of three, and my disappointment after being told by my father that we had arrived at Piccadilly Circus to find there were no clowns performing in the ring, which all the way I had been imagining I should behold. The most vivid and enduring memory, however, of those youthful journeys up Piccadilly is of a china cockatoo sitting on a circular perch which hung in the bow window of Lady Burdett Coutts' house (or was it Bath House?) at the corner of Stratton Street (No. 1) on a level with the tops of the passing omnibuses. That china cockatoo gravely contemplating the passing scene was never absent from its post in the hundreds of times I must have passed, from the first time in the year 1886 until the sedate and shapely house in which it dwelt was pulled down well over forty years later. How long it had been hanging in that window before 1886 I do not know, but I like to imagine at least as long again. Where is that cockatoo now? I hope it still surveys somewhere, with its cold and contemplative eyes, the endless procession of humanity; for I do not like to fancy it hanging in any window commanding a less populated, a less important, a less urbane and worldly aspect. I am disturbed by the thought that perhaps that china bird may be moping in the window of some country house with nothing to regard but the silly sheep, or rabbits gambolling in the dusk. It may even not be hanging in a window at all, but languishing in some cabinet of old porcelain. Rather than fancy for it

such a fate, I should prefer to learn that before the bow-windowed house was pulled down the cockatoo was irreparably smashed during the moving of the furniture.

But in recalling that contemplative china cockatoo I am rebuked, because I feel that the bird itself would be completely unsentimental and as appreciative of the new London which is arising, as I confess I have for the first time found myself during this present serene and lovely month of October. Nevertheless, with all my enjoyment of the new London, it is impossible to keep the mind from straying back into the past, and if such mental excursions are rightly used they can add as much to the richness of the glittering present as a well-devised setting adds to the beauty of a precious stone.

Held up the other morning in Berkeley Street by three red lamps before my taxi could crawl into Piccadilly, I allayed my impatience by transporting myself back to a June day of 1902, when I left Oxford early in the morning in order to attend the funeral of an old friend at Brookwood and when, if I was to be in time at the cemetery, I had to catch a train at Waterloo within twenty minutes of reaching Paddington. 'Ten bob, cabby, if you can get me to Waterloo in twenty minutes.' What a drive! I must insist that galloping across London in a hansom was more exciting than the most reckless taxi ride of to-day. We looked like being held up at the corner of Berkeley Street by a policeman's outstretched arm, but my driver wanted that ten bob. 'Life and death, officer,' he shouted, as with a jingle of bells and accoutrements and clatter of hooves he disregarded the warning arm and swept round into Piccadilly. It was more accurately a matter of death only, but we made Waterloo in seventeen and a half minutes from Paddington. I should hesitate to back myself to make Waterloo from Paddington by taxi on a fine morn-

ing in the height of the season as quickly nowadays, even if we hit every green light in succession all the way. What drivers some of those cabbies were! Recalling that drive the other morning while my taxi crawled up Berkeley Street, I looked back along the crowded pavement in front of the great block of buildings and shops which now occupies the site of old Devonshire House, and I began to evoke again that leisurely wide stretch of pavement of not so very long ago. I suppose more old friends met one another there and stood chatting for a few minutes without bothering or interfering with other pedestrians, than anywhere else in the world. That china cockatoo cocking his wise eye toward the wide pavement must have observed thousands of brief encounters between famous men, and if all the fragments of conversation could have been recorded they would have supplied a complete social history of the period, an encyclopædia of scandal.

It was my good fortune to dance at the last dance held in Devonshire House. That was in November 1921. The process of dismantling the old house preparatory to pulling it down had already started, but for the benefit of some charity the process was interrupted for just one more night. Many years previously Lord Lytton had written a play for amateurs to be performed at Devonshire House for a charity of the time, and among others who took part in it were Charles Dickens and my own grandmother, who, though she had retired from the professional stage when she married, occasionally acted with the novelist when he got up the amateur theatricals he so much enjoyed. Her name was Emmeline Montague and she is the golden-haired Ophelia in Daniel Maclise's picture of the Play Scene in Hamlet which hangs now in the Tate Gallery. The idea for this final celebration in Devonshire House was that the Lytton play should be revived and that as

many as possible of the descendants of those who originally took part in it should take part in it for the second and last time after a lapse of some seventy years. My sister—Fay Compton—took the part her grandmother had played, and some of the grandchildren of Dickens and of Lytton also took part. When the play was over a quadrille was danced in which besides the descendants, Lady Oxford (Mrs. Asquith as she then was), and the great ballerina, Madame Genée, took part. The costumes worn were of the period of George I with the heavy full-bottomed wigs and extremely tight silk breeches. The dance wound up its intricate and graceful course. The shuffle of red-heeled shoes ceased. The fiddles were mute. The dancers vanished like ghosts of the eighteenth century and as we took off our make-up and changed back into modern clothes we could hear the hammers of the house-breakers busy again, knocking down moulded ceilings and fair cornices, panelled walls and delicate balustrades. And that was the end of Devonshire House which had held the wit and beauty, the fortune, rank and eminence of two centuries. I walked across the great courtyard in front and out by the side door into Stratton Street, and as I turned to the right up Piccadilly to reach the old Savile Club at No. 107, I looked up at that china cockatoo and wondered if that immutable bird had watched Lytton and Dickens arrive for the original performance and my own grandmother driving up to Piccadilly from Kensington. The Savile Club is no longer at 107 Piccadilly; 107 Piccadilly itself was soon to follow Devonshire House into the domain of memory. Nowadays the Savile Club inhabits Lulu Harcourt's old house in Brook Street, and apropos of this I cannot help relating a delicious and typical instance of Max Beerbohm's wit. When he visited his old club in its new home he looked round at the florid white

and gold Louis Quinze decorations and painted ceilings and observed: 'Ah! Lulu Quinze, I see.'

It would have been in the month of that last dance at Devonshire House in that in the billiard room of the old Savile Club I heard a remark which sounded like the very footsteps of time passing. Some of us were watching a game of billiards, sitting along the leather sofas on the dais above the table, and in the alcove at the other end of the room Sir William Christie, the late Astronomer-Royal, and Stanley Lane-Pole, the distinguished historian, were confabulating; suddenly through the silence in which we were watching, perhaps, the late Sir William Orpen pot the brown ball at volunteer snooker, we heard the voice of Lane-Pole: 'And they go to places I am told they call cinemas.' 'Indeed? Cinemas? Really?' exclaimed Sir William, whose profound knowledge of stars did not include the stars of the films. This was in 1721, remember, and it shows how cautious the astronomer and the historian are of accepting as facts things which we ordinary mortals so easily and sometimes so prematurely accept as facts. Sir William's mind, ranging over stellar distances measured in light-years had not yet been impressed by the silver screen.

When I started this talk I had not meant to drift away like an autumnal leaf into the past of London. I had meant to luxuriate in this golden October weather of 1737 during which the whole of this great city has seemed to float in time as lightly as one of the leaves of its own plane-trees in one of its own parks. In such weather the destruction of beautiful old houses, which still continues disgracefully unchecked, seems no more than the fall of the leaf, and beneath the milky blue of these October skies, amid the mildness of these October airs, spellbound one has the illusion that what is departing is departing merely for

winter, and that in spring those old houses will appear again. But alas, the illusion cannot be sustained for one instant beyond the last golden ghostly leaf which spins down through the quiet air. The china cockatoo of Piccadilly has gone not with the swallows but with the dodo and the great auk and many another bird which now seems fabulous. Perhaps its circular perch hangs in some enchanted park of immortality where instead of watching a cold greeting between Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli it gazes upon unicorns browsing and eyes the nest of the anxious and devoted phoenix.

No matter, London is still London as secure of the affection of her children as once was Athens, and in my present mood I find the neon crown of London as entrancing as the violet crown of Athens. So, too, I fancy, would that wise china cockatoo of Piccadilly. But where *is* that grave observant bird? As idle a question, I fear, as to ask what songs the sirens once sang.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Not so idle after all, for a correspondent wrote to tell me that it now hangs in the patio of a house in Jerez-de-la-Frontera in Southern Spain.

# The Vanished Colour and Scent of London

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SOMEWHERE about the middle of the nineties of the last century there were two theatrical posters which profoundly shocked prudish opinion. One advertised *The Artist's Model*, the musical comedy which preceded *The Geisha* at Daly's Theatre. It represented a girl holding in front of her an enormous palette but showing (*horribile dictu!*) the top of her shoulders bare and her legs bare half way up the shin, which suggested that if the palette had been taken away she would have had nothing on. Believe it or not, there were indignation meetings held by earnest puritans in public halls to urge the police to tear down this suggestive poster and prosecute the management of the theatre. The other poster which inspired these shocked protests advertised the 'Press Ballet' at the Empire Theatre. This represented a very handsome girl dressed entirely in newspapers but shamelessly exhibiting one leg in stockings from half-way up the thigh downwards!

I do not allude to this poster with any intention of casting a slur either upon the purity of those who displayed it, or upon the much more suspect purity of those who protested against it. I allude to it because the memory of that dashing young woman in her motley of newspapers brings with it a sentimental regret for those gaily coloured journals of London's once upon a time.

It is comparatively but a short while since the *Westminster Gazette's* sea-green and incorruptible pages were a feature of the London dusk, and yet it is already as



remote from the neon-illuminated city of to-day as the sea-green sirens who sang to Ulysses. Then there was the pink *Globe*, but, though I call it pink, it was in fact flesh-coloured compared with the vivid carmine of one edition of that *Star* which is still happily high above the horizon. And in those days another paper still with us, the *Evening News*, emulated the dying dolphin in the prismatic tints of its various editions—some another shade of pink, some creamy buff, and, unless my memory completely deceives me, one a delicate eau-de-nil. The pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette* were always white, but it made up for such modesty by the Byzantine black and orange of its posters. White too were the pages of the *St. James's Gazette*, but, I think I am right in recalling that its posters were red, white and blue. The deaths of these papers are both fairly recent, but who now remembers the yellow pages of the *Echo* or the roseate pages of the *Sun*?

I suppose if we could be transplanted back into the London of a generation ago we should find it more drab than the London of to-day, and no doubt the vivid memory of what seems so much lost colour is the result of that general drabness, and that the impression I retain of places like Piccadilly and Sloane Street strewn at dusk with many coloured bus-tickets thick as autumnal leaves in the brooks of Vallombrosa is really a reflection on the thoroughness of the street cleaning of the period. Yes, I am sure that must be so, because the variety of evening papers procurable tempted people to throw them away much more easily, so that in addition to the bus-tickets the gutters used to be strewn with sodden pink halfpenny *Suns* or halfpenny yellow *Echos*. Yet as I look back I feel less sure about that drabness of the past. The loss of colour brought about by the dismal uniform red of the modern motor-bus is not to be gainsaid. The horse buses used to

lend a magic of their own to the routes they frequented and the localities through which they passed. The green buses of Bayswater had an almost Dryad quality as they jogged along the north side of Hyde Park and the bright scarlet Hammersmith buses on the other side competed even with the Lifeguards in the Knightsbridge Barracks they passed and repassed. The whole sobriety and respectability of South Kensington was manifest in those dark blue buses picked out with chocolate that parted company with their scarlet rivals at Sloane Street.

I suppose that a child living now as I once lived in Avonmore Road, West Kensington, could still choose from the number-plates of those uniform monsters of to-day whether he would return home by way of Knightsbridge and Kensington High Street or by way of Brompton Road and Lillie Road, but I cannot believe that having made his choice he would be conscious of such a world of difference between the two buses. For me to choose whether I would return in a dark blue Kensington bus or a scarlet Hammersmith bus was the kind of choice which must have faced early explorers like Vasco da Gama or Magellan, and, if further excitement were needed, one had the choice between travelling in a London Road Car omnibus with a little Union Jack fluttering in the right-hand top corner or in a London General Omnibus without one. Moreover, in early days at my private school this choice was a matter of almost religious importance, because the whole school was divided into two factions, one of which supported the London Road Car and the District Railway and the other the London General Omnibus and the Metropolitan Railway, and for a fervid Road Car-ite like myself to be condemned by circumstance to defile his honour by travelling in a London General omnibus was a piece of renegade behaviour spiritually abhorrent.

## ECHOES

But what I miss most of London's vanished colour are the window-boxes which, from the beginning of May to the end of July, marked the Season. Marguerites and geraniums, lobelias and calceolarias from top to bottom of every house from Kensington to Mayfair. White and red and pink and blue and yellow. And in the dusk the smell of the fresh-watered earth wafted along the stale streets, the very staleness of which had a half-sweet rustic smell in those days when horses drew the traffic. That smell will never return. It has vanished with the smell of the oranges and the gas in Drury Lane Theatre, with the perfume of the lavender cried at the end of our summer holidays by girls in grey shawls and big hats, with the smell of the dust laid by leisurely watering-carts on a fine May morning, and with the scent of the musk that once upon a time made fragrant the dingiest room in the dingiest slum, but which now all the world over is scentless.

# The 'Nineties

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It is not everybody's experience to see himself turning into a mythical figure before his own eyes. Yet it happened to me in 1917 when I was served up as the central figure of a thriller called *The Gentleman in the Black Fez* which ran as a serial in an Athenian newspaper while I was hardly 100 miles away in the middle of the Aegean. I had the amusement of reading about my own adventures under my own name as a mixture of Sherlock Holmes, Raffles, The Scarlet Pimpernel and a brigand chief until, when I was bound and gagged in a motor car on the way to being put aboard a German submarine, the story came to an abrupt end with the collapse of the political party that wanted to turn me into this mythical desperado.

Nowadays what once happened to me as an individual is happening to periods in which I have lived, for I declare that a later generation has distorted the immediate past so persistently that at last it has imposed upon its own even *more* ignorant juniors what by now is an almost complete falsification of two decades of social history.

I am driven into this outburst after reading *The Aesthetic Adventure* by William Gaunt, because I who have lived through the 'nineties (what nitwit first called them naughty?) and also through that mythical Golden Age called Edwardian, feel that it gives a picture of both periods as highly coloured as my own personality was in that *feuilleton*. The Edwardian fantasy annoys me most — 'this age of guilt, I suppose Mr. Gaunt would have spelt guilt with a "u" for the 'nineties, one of enjoyment, one of those delusive lulls which occur infrequently in the

tempestuous history of mankind.' Thus Mr. Gaunt, rhapsodizing as never the despised Walter Pater would have ventured to rhapsodize even about the Age of the Antonines. Yet the Edwardian decade which began with many weary months of the Boer War and ended with Germany and the House of Lords both on the war-path was split in the middle by the explosion of the General Election of 1906 when the Conservatives who to youth represented the dust of the Victorian Age, were swept away. '“Fin-de-siècle” lingered on as a term for wickedness,' says Mr. Gaunt. '“So fin-de-siècle”, murmured the ladies about some interesting indiscretion, behind their ostrich-plume fans.' Oh dear, oh dear! Fin-de-siècle never *was* a term for wickedness, and it was extinct as fashionable jargon by 1898 at latest. Those ladies with their fans are the kind of creatures a film director invents under the impression that he is achieving a period atmosphere. I draw attention to this Edwardian nonsense because it casts a doubt upon the author's ability to understand the preceding decades or conjure from them more than the caricatures of their representative figures. Take Whistler. The portrait of Whistler leaves behind the impression of a hornet in youth, an angry bee in his prime and a somnolent wasp in age. The author declares him to have been devoid of sympathy and asserts that his fiendish laugh was so blood-curdling in sound that Irving imitated it for some of his most dramatic effects. Now I have heard my mother imitate this blood-curdling laugh and I think the curdling must have come from the rennet of Whistler's wit more than from the sound. During the rehearsals of *Hamlet* at the Lyceum, Irving got into his head that Whistler and my mother were laughing at *bim* and asked my grandfather to forbid them to sit in the stalls, which he (for to him Irving was always right)

duly did. Irving was a great actor and Whistler was a great painter, and the extent of their respective vanity is not worth an argument, but if it was a question of cruel wit then emphatically Irving's was much more cruel than Whistler's.

I re-read *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* the other day, and really all this talk about Whistler's malevolence is much exaggerated. Ruskin, who was also a much greater man than one would suppose from Mr. Gaunt's remarks about him, was utterly in the wrong as a critic and he did libel Whistler, who could be excused for feeling contemptuous of the cowardice which kept his fellow-painters out of the witness-box to testify on his behalf. One of the two that did step forward was W. G. Wills, who besides being a charming painter of children wrote several plays, among them *Charles I* and the words of the song 'I'll Sing thee Songs of Araby'. Wills was a Bohemian of the Murger tradition, for following which Mr. Gaunt sneers at Whistler and is condescending about George du Maurier and his *Trilby*. When I was five or six it was arranged that I should go and sit for my portrait to Wills. At that time he lived in Penywern Road, Earls Court, where one morning I arrived under the escort of the old mid-Victorian nurse who was the bane of my early childhood. We were shown up into a largish room on the first floor without furniture, carpet, or curtains. In fact the only thing in the room was a Spanish onion on the mantelpiece, into which was stuck a penknife. Presently a worried-looking Wills shuffled into the room in carpet slippers to explain that the sitting would have to be postponed because the bailiffs had just taken away all the contents of his house. I can see now the indignant expression on my nurse's face as she flounced off with me, muttering to herself over the dis-

graceful business in which she evidently felt herself somehow involved. I remember turning in the door and looking back at the grey marble mantelshelf on which reposed that Spanish onion spitted by the penknife and envying the discomfited painter his freedom, my own being at the mercy of my detestable nurse. Like Whistler, I too read Murger's *Vie de Bobème* at an impressionable age. Mr. Gaunt laughs at it as a sentimental fairy-tale. No doubt it is, but then Mr. Gaunt never saw that Spanish onion and so missed a beacon to fairyland.

The 'nineties'. It really won't do, you know, to say that they were just a decade in which a number of people made a mess of their private lives in order to uphold the doctrine of art for art's sake and spent any leisure they had in maligning one another. If you take a few bright anecdotes and stick them in a book like stamps in an album you can give an impression of biographical fullness, but the fullness is illusory. I recognize how readable a volume for to-day Mr. Gaunt has produced but he was not in his 'teens during those magical years when it began to seem as if at last Britain was going to emerge from that dreary insularity which was choking contemporary youth. If we prided ourselves on being decadent it was with the decadence of the Roman Empire not of Victorian industrialism, and if we were decadent, so, if Max Nordau's book *Degeneration* was to be believed, were Wagner, Ibsen, Rossetti, Swinburne, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Maeterlinck, all the French Symbolist poets, and even George Bernard Shaw. I commend Max Nordau's *Degeneration* to those whose curiosity, stimulated by *The Aesthetic Adventure*, wishes to understand the state of mind that was being disturbed by the prospect of an æsthetic revolution.

Naturally the Philistines rejoiced in the Wilde case

which seemed to provide convincing evidence that their worst suspicions of those new-fangled ideas about art and literature were only too well-justified. It should be realized, however, that the Puritan and Philistine reaction took various shapes, extending to campaigns against ritualism in the Church of England, the living pictures at the Empire Theatre, and even what was denounced at the abominably salacious poster of *The Artist's Model*, a musical comedy running at Daly's Theatre which showed a young woman with bare legs almost as far as the knee and bare shoulders, holding in front of herself an enormous palette, which completely covered the rest of her. That affront to English purity appeared, I think, in 1896, and the full force of the anti-ritualistic storm did not blow until 1898. Nevertheless the favourable conditions for such various expressions of reaction were created by the disastrous Wilde case in 1895 which, let me add, was a profound shock to European opinion and led directly to that outburst of Continental feeling against what was believed to be the foul hypocrisy of a country capable of such cynical greed as the acquisition of the two little Dutch republics in South Africa.

How vividly I remember a blue and white March afternoon of fifty years ago! I had been to a matinée, I think at Hengler's Circus where now the Palladium stands, or it may have been to a long-forgotten waxwork show in Regent Street run by Louis Tussaud. Anyway, as we stood gathered by an escorting governess to cross Piccadilly for a red Hammersmith omnibus, my eyes were caught by a black and orange poster of the *Pall Mall Gazette* which said: 'Dramatist Sues Sporting Peer for Libel.' That was Saturday, March 2, 1895. Thence onward, until in May Wilde was sent to Reading Gaol to serve a monstrous sentence of two years' hard labour,



every detail of the libel action and the two trials was available in the Press at the price of a penny, no prohibitive expenditure even for schoolboys of twelve years old. No such vile exploitation of one man's folly, misery, and disgrace was ever perpetrated by the Press of this country. It might be rash to surmise that the consciousness of this played any part in the resolve of Mr. Alfred Harmsworth to publish a new kind of a paper which would not be father's paper, only read surreptitiously by the rest of the family. Be that as it may, it was just a year after the Oscar Wilde case that on a fine May morning on my way to school I spent a halfpenny on the first number of the *Daily Mail* instead of an ounce of sweets, and wrote to my father who was away from home most of the year and a *Daily Telegraph* man himself:

'There is a jolly good new paper called the *Daily Mail*. Can we take it instead of the *Daily Graphic*? It only costs a halfpenny and it is much more interesting.'

Whatever criticisms may be levelled against the influence of the *Daily Mail* fifty years ago it did make for ever impossible such a scandal as the exploitation of a case like that of the unfortunate Wilde in the interest of pruriency.

Mr. Gaunt has given an accurate and vivid account of that wretched business, but I do not believe that its effect upon the artistic development of the years that followed was what he suggests. However, it will be fairer to wait for the third volume in which we are promised—to quote—'a connected interpretative account of men and motives that have moulded the creative activity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', before inquiring whether Mr. Gaunt has misjudged those men and their motives.

I remember Max Beerbohm coming to breakfast in my Oxford digs in 1903. He was then in his thirty-second

year. To us undergraduates gathered reverently to do him homage he seemed as immensely and incredibly old as Leonardo's Mona Lisa seemed to Walter Pater. His was the head upon which all the ends of the world were come and the eyelids were a little weary. To us he was the incarnation of that dazzling decade of the 'nineties which, *pace* Mr. Gaunt, we envied as a lost Eldorado of romance whose riches we had been unable to enjoy because we had been imprisoned in school during its golden prime. We tried to make Max talk about that enchanted age but he was mute and, we regretfully feared, bored to extinction by what to such an elegant plumage of mind must be seeming our unattractive callowness. Ten years later, sitting with Max upon the terrace of his house at Rapalla, I recalled this breakfast-party to his memory, and he told me that he used to be petrified with fear when he revisited Oxford because young men were so alarming. And I remembered revisiting Oxford soon after I had gone down and the nervous prostration induced by undergraduates like Michael Sadleir and Middleton Murry.

But that is by the way. The point I want to emphasize is that there was no desire in my generation to disown the 'nineties'. The homage we planned for Max Beerbohm was intended as much to him as the perfect representative of his period as to his individual contribution to it. But perhaps I misjudge Mr. Gaunt in supposing that he considers the 'nineties a cul-de-sac. If I do, I apologize.

# A Valentine

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THIS little tale begins in the blazing August of 1893. I was ten. She was eleven. And we met in the camera obscura on the beach at Hastings. It cost a penny to enter that dark circular hut with a revolving table on which the figures moving about the sunny beach outside were reflected, not like ordinary shadows, but in colour. 'Look, that's my brother,' Dorothy exclaimed. I looked and saw that her brother was wearing the same school cap as myself—the white Maltese cross of Colet Court. Alas, it was Romeo and Juliet over again because Dorothy's brother was a Capulet and I a Montague. In other words Dorothy's brother was Cambridge. I was Oxford. Dorothy's brother supported the London General Omnibus Company, I the London Road Car. Dorothy's brother was an adherent of the Metropolitan Railway, I of the District Railway. The neutral territory of Hastings did not demand that Capulet and Montague should immediately fight one another, but faction's estranging influence forbade intimacy. Cold were the greetings when Dorothy and I emerged from the camera obscura. 'Hullo, Wilson!' 'Hullo, Mackenzie! This is my kiddy sister,' Wilson muttered with a scowl. 'You liar,' said Dorothy, 'I'm a year older than you.' Such a revelation made it impossible for Wilson's dignity to tolerate further intercourse with the chap from his school who had witnessed such a setback at the hands of a sister. We may have been the only two members of that London school in Hastings, but for the rest of these holidays we eyed one another as strangers.

## A VALENTINE

That Michaelmas term, much against my will, I had to attend the dancing class held once a week at Colet Court. Imagine how my heart leapt when I saw in the middle of a bevy of little girls the beloved form of Dorothy dressed in a salmon-coloured, accordion-pleated frock with sleeves of cream—I'm sorry to say I cannot specify the material. One of the horrors of that dancing-class was having to walk across the large hall under the gaze of grinning schoolfellows and after bowing to a girl to be compelled to mutter 'May I have the pleasure of the next dance?' That horro. was no more. With Dorothy as the reward I cared not who grinned. The dancing-master, his cheeks almost as crimson as the silk handkerchief stuck in his shirt-front, actually tapped approval of my bow on his fiddle before he struck up a mazurka. Autumn deepened to a snowy winter. Twice Dorothy and I were guests at the same children's party, and on each occasion I took home with me a shiny dance-programme on which the initials D.W. were nine times faintly inscribed with the inadequate little white pencils attached to such programmes. Dorothy wore a frock of amber silk. I, now eleven, had been promoted to wear an Eton jacket. I felt tremendously old, but somehow I failed to declare my love for Dorothy. Pusillanimous, but there it was. Then in a snowball fight between Oxford and Cambridge Wilson was cut on the forehead by a snowball with a stone in it and as by Tybalt's death in *Romeo and Juliet* relations between the Capulets and the Montagues were exacerbated. My hope of being invited to tea by Wilson some Saturday afternoon was finally extinguished, and the dancing-class was not held in the Lent term. My love for Dorothy seemed doomed to pass silently away like the summery reflections on the table of that camera obscura in which it had begun. It was then

that I saw a Valentine in the window of a shop opposite West Kensington Station. Don't try to picture these shops as they are to-day. In that February fifty-five years ago they were like a row of shops in a quiet market-town. The little old lady who kept that stationer's shop was a figure you might have met in Cranford. The Valentine depicted a little girl in a Kate Greenaway dress at whom Cupid, from the cover of a rose-bush, was shooting his fatal arrow, and it was surrounded by a frill of cut paper, scarlet, gold and silver. I entered the shop. I asked the little old lady in her woollen shawl how much that Valentine cost. I gasped when I heard the price. Sixpence! Christmas card buyers of to-day won't think that very expensive, but believe me it was a very great deal of money in those days. My pocket-money in February 1894 was fourpence a week, payable every Monday morning. On the Saturday afternoon when I made this inquiry I hadn't so much as a farthing in my pocket. In a voice no doubt trembling with apprehension I asked the little old lady if she would keep the Valentine for me till Monday. 'You must take your chance,' she said crossly. Well, to cut the agony short, I borrowed twopence from a kind parlour-maid and on Monday morning, to my inexpressible relief, I found on my way to school by a devious route that the Valentine was still unsold. I can feel now the exquisite texture of that paper frill when the Valentine passed into my hands. What did a sweetless week matter with half a sweetless week to follow? The Valentine was mine and on St. Valentine's morning it would be Dorothy's. Dorothy lived in Talgarth Road. And if anybody now living in Talgarth Road is listening to me she must not think of the view from Dorothy's windows as it would be to-day. There was no Baron's Court Station and at the back of Gliddon Road and oppo-

## A VALENTINE

site the top end of Talgarth Road was what looked like a piece of open country used as a recreation-ground. Here standing beneath a rugged elm, I would watch the front door of Dorothy's house on the chance of beholding that beloved shape coming down the steps. And then on the day before St. Valentine's Day I saw Dorothy. I ran to the wooden paling which bounded the recreation-ground, and called to her. She crossed the road and we communed for a while through the fence. But did I take the opportunity to present her with the Valentine? No. I showed her my latest catapult instead. She expressed admiration. I pressed it upon her. She accepted it. I went home without declaring my love and persuaded the kind parlour-maid to buy the Valentine from me for threepence, which gave me a penny in hand to lay out on four ounces of sweets. My summer holidays of 1894 were spent in Brittany, and that was much too exciting a business to have any time for thinking about love.

# My First Novel

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I NEVER intended to be a novelist; I always meant to be a playwright. In 1906, being at the time just twenty-three, I wrote an eighteenth-century comedy to encourage my father to continue the allowance of £150 a year he was then making me. He agreed to put *The Gentleman in Grey*, as the play was called, into his repertory as early as possible in the following year. The production was fixed for the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, at the beginning of March 1907. In the previous week the company was playing at His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen, and rehearsing hard all day. On Sunday morning when we had to travel down to Edinburgh my father's voice had vanished, and he whispered hoarsely that next day the understudies would have to be rehearsed for the performance of *The School for Scandal* on the opening night.

'But what will happen to my play on Thursday if the understudies spend all their time rehearsing *The School for Scandal*?' I exclaimed in consternation. 'You'd better let me play Charles Surface for you.'

'Do you think you could learn the part overnight?'

'Easily.'

So on Monday morning I had one rehearsal of Charles Surface and then went on with the rehearsal of my own play. It was rather an ordeal to disappoint an Edinburgh audience by taking the place of my father, who was greatly admired and much loved as an actor all over Scotland.

On Monday night, my father's voice being still a

croaking whisper, I sat up and learned the part of Bob Acres in *The Rivals*, and on Tuesday played it. On Tuesday night I sat up again and learned Tony Lumpkin in *She Stoops to Conquer*, but mercifully my father's voice was strong enough for him to play at the Wednesday matinée and I was able to devote all my attention to the rehearsal of my own play, which was given its first performance on the Thursday evening and generously received both by the Edinburgh audience and the Edinburgh critics. Yet I was dissatisfied. The actors and the actresses all gave good performances, but they were none of them my characters as I had imagined them, and although *The Gentleman in Grey* remained in my father's repertory for three or four years, I never saw a performance of it that did satisfy me.

That autumn of 1907 I went to live with a parson friend at Cury in Cornwall, half-way between Helston and the Lizard, and one evening in November I sat down after tea at a small table lighted by a couple of candles with red shades and started to write the ideal performance of *The Gentleman in Grey* in the shape of a novel called *The Passionate Elopement*. At that date I had published a slim volume of poems, dramatized *Kipps* by H. G. Wells, edited a university magazine and written a good many comic pages for *The Isis*, for which I was paid half a guinea a page—and never has any cheque for work since seemed as bountiful as those cheques for four guineas I used to receive at the end of the term from the white-bearded patriarchal Mr. Alden, whose dignity was proof against even the small, faded blue cricket-cap he used to wear indoors on his domed head.

I marvel now at the self-confidence with which I sat down to write a novel without having even tried my hand at a short story. Certainly I was well equipped to write a



romance about the eighteenth century, because as a boy I had read besides the whole of Fielding, Richardson and Smollett every eighteenth-century play in my father's library. On top of that experience—which made it easy for me to think and write in an eighteenth-century manner—I discovered in my friend's house a couple of scrapbooks with many original letters, bills, and other odds and ends of the days of the Georges. Finally, I had a copy of Anstey's enchanting satire in verse, *The New Bath Guide*, which was of inestimable service for evoking the atmosphere of the imaginary spa called Curtain Wells. I cannot remember now who has that manuscript, written with a copying ink pencil, but I do not think that the owner will find many cancelled pages in it.

*The Passionate Elopement* was finished some time in the spring of 1908, and in due course the typescript was sent off to Jack Murray—Sir John Murray, K.C.V.O., to-day—who was at Magdalen with me and who had said one day that if I ever did write a book he hoped I would send it along to 50, Albemarle Street. It never occurred to me for a moment that the historic publishing house would not be pleased that I had remembered my promise, and I really was astounded when a fortnight later I received a letter from Jack Murray to say how disappointed he was that the two best readers they had had both turned the novel down, and so, regretfully, he had to tell me that he was sending back my typescript. Oddly, as it seems to me to-day, one of the reasons given by the readers for refusing *The Passionate Elopement* was its cynicism.

The typescript was wrapped up again, registered, and dispatched to Hutchinson's, to whose attention one of their popular novelists, Frankfort Moore, had recommended it. Back it came almost at once. I then sent it to another famous firm of publishers. They wrote an

appreciative letter which warmed me after the cold water of the Murray and Hutchinson refusals, but went on to say that they could not risk the expense of publishing so unusual a book and could only undertake to publish it if I was prepared to pay the cost in advance. To this I said 'no'. Meanwhile, my mother had sent a copy of my poems to Henry James and asked him if he would be kind enough to recommend my novel to the attention of William Heinemann. Henry James wrote an encouraging letter about the poems and promised to mention the novel to Mr. Heinemann, while warning us that Mr. Heinemann would decide for himself about the merits of the book and deploring my interest in what he called that monstrous century. *The Passionate Elopement* came back from Heinemann's in three days. Some years later I met the head of the firm and he said how much he regretted that I had not sent my first book to him. When I told him what had happened his face darkened, and I felt that somebody at Heinemann's was going to be asked why the letter from Henry James had not been forwarded to him in the south of France.

After that the typescript was sent to publisher after publisher, and I became so bored with packing it up that I gave up registering it. I made a vow that I would not attempt to write another novel until *The Passionate Elopement* was published and a bound copy of it on my desk, and I took up daffodil-growing instead of writing. By 1910 the book had been rejected by eleven publishers, and my father delivered an ultimatum. 'The only evidence that you are a novelist is for a publisher to accept your novel. Why you do not go on writing plays I cannot imagine. Anyway, you will have to go on the stage, and earn some money.'

So I took an engagement in August to appear in a play

by Hall Caine at the Garrick Theatre, in the course of which, as a shipwrecked priest, I had to give absolution to the Deemster's son, played by Bransby Williams. At the end of the one and only week's run I met H. G. Pélissier of the Follies and agreed to write words to his music for a revue to be produced at the Alhambra in September. The day after this was settled I received a letter from Martin Secker to inquire whether a novel of mine called *The Passionate Elopement* was still available. He had read it in typescript when he was learning publishing with Eveleigh Nash, and he would like to have an opportunity of reading it again if possible. But where was the novel now? At last I remembered that I had sent it to Constables some months ago. I wrote to inquire about it and presently I received it back with a letter to say that it had been mislaid in their office and that they regretted the book was not suitable for their list.

Martin Secker made up his mind within a day or two of receiving the typescript. He proposed to make it the first novel he published, and the date fixed was January 17, 1911, which was my twenty-eighth birthday. At that date it was considered madness to publish a book in January, but Martin Secker's influence on publishing was revolutionary in its day and the notion that books could be published safely only in March, April, September, and October has long ago been exploded.

When the book had been sent to press I was sitting at midnight in the Café de l'Europe and taking a last look at my own copy of the page proofs. Suddenly I thought that the opening sentence 'The meagre sun that for thirteen pallid February days' was unlucky. I telephoned Secker next morning to ask if it was too late to change 'thirteen' to 'fifteen': he got into touch with Ballantynes, the printers, and the change was safely made.

But in my superstitious spasm I had forgotten that the book began on Valentine Day which by changing 'thirteen' to 'fifteen' I had made February 16 instead of February 14. It was too late to make the second correction and so the first edition of *The Passionate Elopement*, which is a rarity to-day, can always be spotted by that 'fifteen' in the first line. It was a beautifully printed and tastefully bound book, and it was gratifying to see that first edition of it shown at the National Book League's Exhibition in 1951, as an example of fine book production at a date when novels were usually produced without taste in printing or binding. The book itself was given an overwhelmingly generous reception by the reviewers, and went into five editions in the first year. It was published in the United States and in four different cheap editions, including Macmillan's famous sevenpennies. Now it is being published in a new edition, forty-five years after I finished it in the spring of 1908, and I have just heard that it is soon to be broadcast as a serial play. So what began as a play is to be a kind of play again.

If any young authors who are finding it difficult to persuade publishers to accept their first novels happen to be listening to me, they may be encouraged to hear that in the palmy days before the First World War it could be just as difficult to make a start as it is to-day. Yet the book that is rejected eleven times may possess life, and if it does it will at last get its chance. I do not believe in the existence of 'mute inglorious Miltons'.

And now I shall risk a generalization. As far as my knowledge of literature goes, all the genuine novelists have started off with a story in which no trace of autobiography is perceptible. *The Pickwick Papers*, *Barry Lyndon*, *The Shaving of Shagpat*—there is no time to give the long list. If a young writer's first novel depends on

his personal experience, I say firmly that he is not a genuine novelist. I shudder to think what kind of a mess I should have made of *Sinister Street* if it had been my first novel. *The Passionate Elopement* is a *tour de force* of bravura for a young man of twenty-four, and presumably it must have a life of its own behind the bravura or it would not be readable forty-five years later.

# People

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I WONDER how many people were taught how to dodge the Customs by a future Lord Chancellor. It happened this way. Two masters at my prep. school used to take a party of small boys for the summer holidays to a house near St. Nazaire at the mouth of the River Loire, where they were coached every morning for whatever was before them—the entrance examination for the Navy or a scholarship at some public school. Just before we passed through the barrier at Victoria Station to board the train for Newhaven one of our tutors—a tall good-looking young man still in his twenties—gave each of the half dozen small boys on the verge of their first crossing of the Channel two quarter-pound packets of tea.

‘Put one in each pocket of your greatcoats. And don’t say a word about them when we’re passing through the customs.’

The tall good-looking young schoolmaster who gave us what I shall euphemistically call this worldly advice was to be Mr. Justice Sankey twenty years later, and when fifteen years later still Lord Sankey became Lord Chancellor, the other young schoolmaster was still taking the same form at that prep. school. Both men were Oxford scholars, both men were equally good-looking, both men were equally popular with us small boys. I do not remember a clearer example of fortune’s favour. Mind you, I’m not suggesting that success is ever entirely a matter of fortune. We have to deserve her smiles or they’d turn to frowns quickly enough. All the same, she

sometimes seems to frown perversely. I think soldiers provide the best examples of this. Take the late Lord Wavell for instance. I first met him in 1916 when he was a Major in the Black Watch on his way from France to be Military Attaché to the Russian Armies in the Caucasus.

'What did you think of Archie Wavell?' my hostess asked later.

I expressed pleasure and astonishment at having at last met an officer from G.H.Q. in France who realized that there was such a sea as the Mediterranean and that there was even a war going on at one end of it.

'I'm glad he impressed you,' my hostess replied, 'because *we* think he's going a very very long way.'

And so he did. Nevertheless, fortune at last treated him badly because he was set impossible tasks in the last war and finally an impossible task as Viceroy and the grandeur of his achievement is sometimes forgotten in the fame of other men whose own success in more favourable circumstances would never have been won without Wavell's long battle to achieve the impossible.

The last time I saw him was at a Divisional dinner when he told me he was considering writing a life of General Sir Ian Hamilton.

'But I don't think I can find the time,' he added.

And a few months later we had lost him.

Ian Hamilton was another soldier to whom fortune was at last unkind. His military career from the time he was wounded as a subaltern in the Gordons at Majuba until he was chosen to command the Expeditionary Force at Gallipoli had been brilliantly successful. He was brave and handsome; he was able to write well; he was married to a rich and most enchanting wife.

I once said to him:

'I've never understood, sir, why you didn't resign when the strength you asked for at Gallipoli was refused.'

'My dear boy, a soldier can't resign.'

I saw him last in July 1747, six months before he died toward the close of his ninety-fifth year. A day or two later I was to fly back to Simla, and it had been in Simla sixty years earlier that he had courted and won the beautiful Jean Muir. As we sat there on the sunny terrace of his house looking across Hyde Park he was a handsome young Brevet Lt.-Colonel again at Simla and I was a small boy of four in the summer of the Golden Jubilee—both of us sixty years away from the summer of 1747.

I remember sitting next Lady Hamilton at lunch one day when at the other end of the table the liveliest and most active octogenarian I have ever known was laughing away to his guests.

'You wouldn't think to look at Ian now that he could ever be cruel,' his wife observed, with a smile. 'But he could be. I used to like dancing when we were first married, but Ian always wanted to go home early. One evening when I was anxious to stay for one more dance, what do you think he said to me? He said, "You wouldn't if you knew what you looked like in this heat."'

If I were asked what gift to wish for a godson or a god-daughter I should reply without hesitation 'the gift of growing old with increasing affection from others.'

Ian Hamilton was granted that gift lavishly because he bore the disappointment of his military career with such grace and dignity and remained young to the end.

Tim Healy was another man who remained young in heart and head. I once enjoyed the privilege of sitting up with him till the small hours almost every night for over a week when I was his guest at the old Viceroy's Lodge in Dublin soon after he had become Governor-



General of the Irish Free State. G. K. Chesterton, who was a fellow-guest, used to surrender to bed three or four hours earlier. Tim Healy, who was then on the edge of seventy, used to tell me wonderful stories about the days when the Irish Nationalist members were such a problem to British Parliamentary procedure.

'And you know we never really thought those days would ever come to an end, and then those young men'—he was speaking of Sinn Fein—'swept us away in a night.'

It was Tim Healy who gave me a clearer view of Mr. Gladstone's personality than any I've had. He was talking about some knotty point being debated at the time of the Parnell trouble.

'And I said to him "Sir" '—then he paused and looked at me, 'you know we all of us always called him "Sir",' he added solemnly.

When I read cheap sneers at Gladstone by earnestly cynical young men who hope they may be mistaken for embryo Lytton Stracheys, I remember that those uncompromising Irish Nationalist Members always called him 'Sir'.

Tim Healy had a lightning wit. The stories about him are legion, but I think my favourite is about him and the late Lord Glenavy when they were appearing against one another in a divorce suit in which a well-known Dublin figure had been cited as co-respondent. In those days a good deal of dramatic eloquence was a feature of the Irish Bar, and Mr. Campbell, Q.C., as Lord Glenavy was in those days, waxed emotionally eloquent about the wrong done to his client by the co-respondent who was seated in the well of the court.

'And let me tell you, gentlemen of the jury, and let me tell the co-respondent'—fixing him with a stern eye—

## PEOPLE

'that the tale of what my client has had to suffer at his hands has brought tears to my eyes.'

Up jumped Tim Healy in a flash, his dark beard wagging. 'My Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, you have now witnessed the greatest miracle since Moses struck the rock.'

# Places

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THE places I have loved best I have always tried to avoid revisiting after I have left them, because I like to keep the picture of them in my mind's eye as they were once upon a time so that in evoking them I evoke simultaneously myself once upon a time. I am particularly loth to revisit a house where I formerly lived or with which I was formerly intimate, and profoundly as I disapprove of pulling down old houses I have to confess to being glad that some old houses I knew erstwhile are no longer bricks and mortar. I think of such a one in Oxford which was pulled down to widen a corner for traffic nearly fifty years ago. Cars, buses, lorries, bicyclists drive through what long ago was an entrance hall papered with a Morris wallpaper which is no longer printed and is probably not to be seen on any wall to-day. There used to be an early Georgian hooded porch over the front door and that was preserved when the house vanished to be re-erected above a doorway in a country town. When I saw that porch last I could almost have wished it had vanished with the rest of that old house, so many ghosts of my springtime waited beneath it to be admitted through a door that no longer existed. I can see every room of that old house as I wait in my car for the traffic lights to give the signal of safety. It is better thus than to see its interior as it might be to-day if it survived with modern decorations and modern furniture and modern pictures on walls stripped long since of their Morris wallpapers. Now, when the car pauses at the red lights, I can walk in spirit through an opening door

## PLACES

to be greeted by the voices of long ago well-loved and enter rooms safe from change in the inviolable crystal of memory.

Nevertheless, there is one kind of revisiting that I do enjoy and that is to gardens planted by myself once upon a time. I am thinking particularly of an acre in Hampshire I planted fifty-five years ago. I can look at an oak-tree the roots of which as a sapling I trod into the heavy wet November earth and the trunk of which I tied to a pole for support against the wintry gales. That oak is far from being anything like a majestic tree yet. Another couple of centuries must elapse before it will be that. Still, were I thirteen to-day I could carve my name on the trunk of that oak without a letter of it curling round out of sight. As for a horse-chestnut I planted I was staggered by the size of it when I saw it a few months ago. I assure any young reader who may be reading what I say that if he wants a pleasure for his old age he should plant a bare acre with trees and come back in the twenty-first century to gaze with wonder at his own grove.

Places I avoid visiting if possible are those which have become so familiar by illustration that they are exactly what one thought they would be. I remember being roused by the pullman attendant on the way from New York to Toronto to look at Niagara on a grey morning in late autumn. Well, of course it was merely like looking at another photograph of Niagara, and nobody wants to be woken up to do that. On the other hand, familiar though the sky-line of New York is in pictures, I believe that any traveller who sees it for the first time from the deck of a liner will be thrilled by a sudden surprise because no pictures of it can possibly communicate the marvel of that towering scene. I had expected the same

thrill from a first sight of the harbour of Rio de Janeiro in spite of its picture-book familiarity, but the fantastic scene somehow disappointed; perhaps it was too fantastic.

On the other hand Egypt was continuously obvious: I should be inclined to call Cairo the greatest disappointment of my travels so far as cities go. How commonplace it is beside lovely Damascus! The Pyramids are . . . well, they are just the Pyramids and you can see them in any photograph. As for the Sphinx, when they dug the sand away her mystery disappeared and to-day she looks like a large cat sitting in a bath.

The greatest surprise of my journeys in the East was Pagán, which was once the capital of Burma and after being sacked by Khubla Khan at the end of the thirteenth century was abandoned.

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure dome decree.*

He could have found a thousand models for it in Pagán. The site of the forsaken capital covers an area of about four square miles and wherever the eye looks it sees pagodas—huge pagodas, small pagodas, whole pagodas, ruined pagodas, fragments of pagodas—and many temples as well, to the reputed number of 5,000 in all. One dome is larger than the dome of St. Paul's. The great majority of these pagodas are of rose-red brick, the plaster (if they ever were plastered) having worn away in the course of 800 years, but the dryness of the climate in this part of Burma has preserved the brick in the same way as I imagine Petra the 'rose-red city half as old as time' has been preserved. In many of the temples great Buddhas stand as they have stood for over a thousand years. I

## PLACES

recall one of those erect gilded figures about forty feet high, whose right hand is extended to receive what seems the secret of the world. A huge cobra at the Buddha's feet winds up to show above his head its own fearsome countenance with gilded hood.

If ever Burma be peaceful again in our time Pagán should be sought by travellers not only because of the richness of the architecture but because the climate there in winter is the best I have experienced anywhere, and being beside the Irrawaddy it could be easily reached. It is astonishing that the fame of such a place was not spread far and wide before it became unreachable by the ordinary traveller.

I have always had a great fondness for small islands. Indeed, I have spent thirty years of my life on small islands, and eight of them on the diminutive Channel island of Jethou, of whose fifty acres myself and my household were the only inhabitants. I suppose many people would feel cramped by living within the circumference of a mile. Yet I never took a walk without seeing or hearing something new and without the feeling that if I persevered I could find out everything about the miniature world in which I dwelt. One of the handicaps of contemporary existence is the continuously rapid expansion of human knowledge which drives people into specialization and therefore constricts their outlook. Life on a small island restores human dignity: the individual is not overwhelmed by his own unimportance. This is particularly beneficent for the artist, who requires the solitude necessary to make him feel that the work he is producing to-day is not a futile drop in an ocean of human endeavour. Goethe said round about 1820 that it would be impossible for a human being to produce a major work of art in the future because the trance required by the artist was no

longer attainable in the publicity of the modern world. If Goethe felt that in 1820 what would he have felt about to-day?

But perhaps artists and seers always felt that. My mind goes back to the little island of Patmos and to the cave there in which St. John wrote his Revelation. Patmos, with its rocks of porphyry that in certain lights can without exaggeration be called purple, set in the deep-blue foam-flecked Aegean sea, possesses so mysterious a character of its own that such a work as the Revelation seems then a natural product of the place. The cave to which the Apostle retired is a dark maze round which the visitor wanders under the guidance of a monkish hermit carrying a thin tallow candle. Awe descends upon the least imaginative man in these chill glooms, and when he emerges into the sunlight he will find himself talking in undertones. Above the cave a stony road runs steeply up to the summit of a hill a thousand feet high on which stands a monastery a thousand years old. Vaulted stairways, frescoes mouldering in the sea-damp, columns, porticoes, bells with wooden clappers, a sea of undulating stone roofs . . . the antiquity of it all was overpowering. Here we gazed at a manuscript of wine-coloured vellum lettered in silver five hundred years older than the monastery itself, and in the refectory the Abbot and his brethren received us, sitting on one side of an ancient table scored with the marks of how many myriads of meals while we sat in a row opposite and sipped a delicious liqueur flavoured with cinnamon. The long line of double windows looked out across the Aegean and the blustering north wind that rattled them from time to time sounded within no louder than a whisper. The island below seemed as if it might have served the Apostle as a model for the twisted dragon of the Apocalypse.

'I, John . . . was in the island, which is called Patmos, for the word of God.'

Sitting there in the time-haunted refectory of that immense fortress of faith I could believe those words from the Book of Revelation had been written but yesterday.

It is a far cry from Patmos to Seville, but except Cairo with dislike I have mentioned no city yet, and I think that the view of Seville from the top of the Giralda Tower, that miraculous feat of a Moorish architect, is the fairest prospect of a city I have ever been granted. I have looked over Paris from Montmartre, not to mention the Eiffel Tower: I have gazed at Manhattan from the top of the Woolworth building in New York: I have seen Edinburgh from the Castle Rock; pored upon Rome from all its seven hills, upon Florence from Fiesole, and upon Athens from the steeps of Lycabettus; but that view of Seville on a cloudless New Year's Day in 1902, the bells in the Giralda Tower pealing, still holds the supremacy in my mind's eye. Yet the view is nothing more remarkable than a flat white city outspread on either side of a river. There is no Acropolis; there is no Roman Campagna with the blue Alban Hills beyond . . . I am really at a loss to know why that view of Seville remains so vividly in my fancy. I shall not make the mistake of ascending the Giralda Tower again to find out. I saw the city of Seville with the eyes of eighteen years. Let it remain a vision of youth and immune from disillusionment. And here is something more that remains vividly in my memory from that New Year's morning half a century ago: when I descended from the tower and was walking past the mighty cathedral the clangour of the bells was shaking down the oranges from the trees in the plaza.



# Things

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LOOKING at the slim crescent of the young December moon, the other night, I feared my eyes, already giving me trouble, had decided to be more troublesome still because, beside the silver crescent a ghostly replica of it was apparently hanging, the cusp of the false crescent touching the lower horn of the real moon. I fetched a friend out of doors to tell me whether I was suffering from an optical illusion, but he confirmed the phenomenon. Many of us have seen the old moon asleep in the new moon's arms, as the phrase goes, and some of us have seen a lunar rainbow, but I can find no record of the lunar behaviour I have just mentioned and it goes to join my collection of rarities in the way of natural sights. One of these is a red rainbow which I saw once over the island of Sark at the moment the sun was setting behind Guernsey: I have not found that phenomenon recorded in any book.

I wish I could claim that I had seen the ghost of a human being as well as the ghost of a crescent moon, but, alas! I never have. I have left no avenue unexplored, as the politicians say, but no avenue up till now has provided a ghost at the end of it. Indeed, I can remember only one puzzling manifestation for which I have never found a solution. This was the manner of it. On a breathless night of frost in the winter of 1904 I was reading in the library of the ancient house in which I lived on the outskirts of the town of Burford in Oxfordshire, when I heard a sound like the lisp of the wind in withered reeds—a kind of thin piping on the air of the quiet room. A bull-

dog and a Manx cat were living with me at that date. The bulldog on the hearthrug paid no attention to the sound, but the cat lying in an arm-chair opposite mine looked up and stared with round eyes in the direction of the sound. I thought a large moth might be fluttering on the window pane, but when I pulled the curtain there was nothing to be seen except the motionless orchard in the frosty moonlight. Downstairs, my gardener was studying seed catalogues in the kitchen, and I rang for him to come up and suggest an explanation for the strange sound. When he opened the door of my room the sound went past him out into the corridor, a faint sibilance upon the air.

'Did anything go past you when you opened the door?' I asked.

'Yes, something went singing past me like a kettle down the passage.'

The gardener unhooked the reflector lamp from the wall, but we could see nothing. However, when we reached the end of the corridor which ran the length of the house we heard the sound again, moving back toward my library. We followed it, but instead of going into the library it went up to a box-staircase that led to the great empty attic in the roof.

'Can it be a bat?' I asked.

'Queer kind of a bat,' was the contemptuous reply. 'Besides, we'd have seen a bat.'

'Is it the wind?' I pressed.

'There isn't no wind to-night. The night's as bright as day and as quiet as the grave.'

Twice up and down the length of the long attic we followed that elusive sibilance which kept what seemed about a yard ahead of us; and then abruptly the air in the attic was as silent as the frosty night without. The sound

had apparently passed away through the blind gable-end.

'What can it have been?' I asked when we were back in the library.

'I reckon it were a ghost.'

'You think it was?'

'I'm sure on it. It gave me the same feeling I had when I was walking up the garden one night and a ghost put his hand on my shoulder and let out a great puff right in my ear-hole.'

'Did you see that ghost?' I asked incredulously.

'No, but we didn't see this one, come to that,' my gardener retorted.

Well, whatever that sibilance may have been to this day I've not been able to account for it.

Although I have not been successful in seeing a ghost do not let me suggest that I am sceptical about the possibility of their being seen by other people. I have never been lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the Loch Ness Monster either. Omens are my strong suit in the game of what some poor folk call superstition. I dislike the sight of crossed knives. I refuse to walk under ladders. I feel uncomfortable when I have seen the new moon through glass. I toss a pinch of spilt salt over my shoulder. And as for peacocks . . . well, listen to this experience with peacocks.

At the end of November 1916, when I was chief of our counter-espionage organization in Athens, things were boiling up for a crisis if the British and French delivered their threatened ultimatum on December 1st to demand the handing over of some Greek mountain-batteries. Two or three days before the fateful date my French opposite number came to lunch with me and talk over the situation. As we sat down at table, noticing that the knives were

crossed, I uncrossed them. My guest exclaimed at the superstitious gesture.

'Ah well, it's not only crossed knives that I'm superstitious over. Peacocks always portend misfortune for me.'

'A peacock? What can a peacock do?' my opposite number jeered. 'Really, for an intelligent man like you to be afraid of peacocks is a little too strong.'

At that moment there was a knock on the door, and my chauffeur came in to say that one of our agents had just returned from his mission to Sparta and had brought back for me as a gift from the Mayor of Sparta two peacocks. You can imagine my consternation. Even my sceptical French friend was taken aback when we went down into the garden and saw those birds. I sent the peacocks away, but the warning had been given. Two days later my house was surrounded and turned into a pepper-pot by rifles and machine-gun fire an hour before the ultimatum was delivered. However, wiser than Caesar over the soothsayer's warning about the Ides of March, I *bad* heeded the omen of those peacocks and I was not at home when the mob broke in. But that's not the end of the story. Sixteen years later, when I was Rector of Glasgow University, I was asked to give a talk to the students of the International Club, and as I went into the hall I saw mounted on a frame on the wall a peacock's plumage. When I sat down after my talk one of the students asked me to go to the telephone to speak to my secretary. The news was bad. My publishers had rung up from London to say that I was to be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act for my third volume of War Memories which had been at once withdrawn from circulation. And in that volume I had told the story of the ominous peacocks from Sparta. The official secrets to

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which the authorities objected all verged upon the farcical, but those peacocks were not among them.

Can superstition be called a thing?

*The time has come, the walrus said,  
To talk of many things,  
Of shoes and ships and sealing-wax,  
Of cabbages and kings,  
And why the sea is boiling hot,  
And whether pigs have wings.*

I hope those last two lines allow me to call superstition a thing. Of course, the ideal person to talk about things in the strictest sense is a collector, but I lack the collector's temperament. The only things that I have amassed during my life are books and gramophone records, and I have not collected them for the sake of collecting. I have acquired them in order to read or to play them.

The collector derives pleasure from his possession of something that a rival collector lacks. There is something of the old-fashioned miser about him, too. I doubt if the meanest rich man of to-day gets anything like as much pleasure out of his wealth as the old-fashioned miser used to get out of jingling his pile of gold. I have known many collectors of anything from postage-stamps to modern paintings, and I have detected in all of them the same egotistical possessiveness. Mind you, I'm not saying that a silver snuff-box may not give æsthetic pleasure to its owner, but if he be a keen collector the greatest pleasure he will derive from that snuff-box is less its perfection of design than the fact of being the only person who possesses such a snuff-box.

Book-collectors are strange folk: they like to buy or read a book and then lock it up in a cupboard—without

reading it. I would never buy a book that I didn't intend to read. The more beautiful the binding and the printing the more pleasure for me in reading it. The trouble is that a book in what is called 'mint' condition fetches more money. Hence the buying up of these limited editions and producing them when the market looks healthy. I was one of the original subscribers to Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* at £33 10s. a copy, as I remember. I sold mine at the top of the market for £400, *but* I read it first from cover to cover and therefore technically it was not in 'mint' condition when I sold it.

I do not blame the book-collector for locking up his rarities. He knows from bitter experience that half his friends may be book-thieves. We recognized this even in childhood.

*Steal not this book for fear of shame  
For in it is the owner's name.*

But we did not know in our youthful innocence that a book-thief is incapable of shame. I doubt if even the book-thief who is caught red-handed in a bookshop and prosecuted feels the slightest shame at his exposure.

If you are inclined to be sentimental about friendship, if you are inclined to suppose that cynics refuse to recognize the passionate virtue of the ordinary man, try putting on your bookshelf two or three of those volumes which second-hand booksellers classify under the heading 'Curious' or 'Facetiae': they will all vanish, thereby demonstrating first that your friends are prurient because they want to read such books, secondly that your friends are cowards because they lack the courage to borrow such books, and finally that your friends are thieves because they do not flinch from stealing such books, yes, and with

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the book in their pocket will have the effrontery to thank you for letting them look round your wonderful library.

But I do not want to end on this melancholy note of human depravity. Let me praise the collector who bequeathes his collection, whether it be of china or fans or armour or books, to be enjoyed by others. And let us devoutly hope that some of the books he gives to the public were stolen from a friend.

# Old Snapshots

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I HAVE been reading as entertaining an anthology as I ever picked up. It was made by Mr. Holbrook Jackson and is designed in the words of the anthologist to show 'what writers of books think of their predecessors, their contemporaries and themselves. . . . The glimpses I have given of many authors—what they looked like, where and how they lived, how they worked, played, talked, dined, loved, quarrelled, and died—are intended to make a composite portrait of a writer of books.'

Mr. Holbrook Jackson has prospected far and wide for the gold he has mined for our delectation. The bibliography occupies ten full pages, which means to say he must have read and marked about 300 books. As might be expected, the letters of authors have provided a rich vein of precious metal, and I found myself reflecting that the anthologist of the future was likely to be disappointed in this particular field because letter-writing must become more and more injuriously affected by the speed-up of communication and the increase of impersonal correspondence compared with the personal correspondence that used to be almost the only way for a man to keep in touch with his friends.

Yet in June 1802 William Wordsworth was writing to his sister Dorothy:

'Partly from some constitutional infirmities and partly from certain habits of mind, I do not write any letters unless upon business, not even to my dearest friends. Except during absence from my own family I have not



written five letters of friendship during the last five years.'

And Tom Moore records a conversation in August 1837 apropos of Southey's profuse letter-writing, in which Wordsworth said that, for his own part, such was his horror of having his letters *preserved*, that in order to guard against it, he always took pains to make them as bad and dull as possible.

Well, perhaps enough letters, which I myself detest except as a third party who neither has to write nor answer one of these threats to leisure, will survive the ruthlessness of paper-salvage so minute a proportion of which is allotted to anything except the papyromania of bureaucracy, to give posterity an opportunity to discover that the private life of writers has not changed much.

There is another threat to the preservation of idiosyncrasy and that is the increasing lack of the good raconteur. The death of a man like Edmund Gosse, for instance, carried across the Lethean stream a bundle of memories never chronicled by him nor, I fear, by those who enjoyed the privilege of listening to one of the finest raconteurs of our time. Two of his tales were about Herbert Spencer, and I relate them now all the more willingly because Mr. Holbrook Jackson's anthology does not contain a single flower of Herbert Spencer.

The first tale is of a visit paid by the late Lord Houghton as a boy to Herbert Spencer and Thomas Carlyle on the same day.

The experience had exhilarated young Monckton-Milnes in the way a schoolboy would have been exhilarated by obtaining a couple of three-cornered Cape of Good Hope stamps on the same day.

'How d'ye do, Mr. Carlyle?' the boy began with in-

genuous enthusiasm. 'You are the second great writer I have met to-day.'

'Imphm? Is that so, laddie?'

'Yes, Mr. Carlyle. I met Mr. Herbert Spencer this morning.'

'Oh, you met Mr. Herbert Spencer, did you, laddie?'

'Yes, Mr. Carlyle.'

'Well, well, then you can brag that you've met the most unending ass in Christendom.'

And here is Gosse's story of an evening in what used to be called the drawing-room in the Savile Club's old home at 107 Piccadilly. It was never really a room for conversation and was usually populated by senior members reading. In one of the arm-chairs sat Herbert Spencer absorbing the *Quarterly Review* when in came Swinburne, of whom Lady Burne-Jones, quoted in *Bookman's Holiday*, wrote: 'He was restless beyond words, scarcely standing still at all and almost dancing as he walked.'

In 1857 George Birkbeck Hill, who was a kinsman of my own, had written from Oxford: 'Yesterday I was in Swinburne's room. I wish you could know the little fellow. He is the most enthusiastic fellow I ever met, and one of the cleverest. He wanted to read me some poems he had written. . . . They were really very good, and he read them with such earnestness, so truly feeling everything he had written that I for the first time in my life enjoyed hearing the poetry of an amateur.'

However, Swinburne had a very shrill voice when he was not reading his poetry, and on that evening in the Savile he was holding forth on some prosaic topic. In order to gain stature he was standing upon the fender from which in his excitement he kept slipping. Every time he slipped with a clang Herbert Spencer's long upper lip appeared above the *Contemporary Review* taut with

disapproval. Finally, Gosse saw the high priest of individualism put his hand in his pocket, from which he drew a pair of silencers. These he placed over his head and drew down to protect his ears against the fidgety poet's piercing voice and his inability to remain quietly balanced on the fender.

Mention of the Savile in its Piccadilly home reminds me of an experience of my own in those days. I was sitting one evening in the inglenook beside the fireplace in the billiard room when W. B. Yeats, who was a recently elected member, came in and sat down beside me.

'I believe you have paid some attention to astrology?' he observed.

'I've read a certain amount about it,' I admitted.

'Then you will be interested to hear that my horoscope shows an exact sext between the planet Mercury and the planet Venus, thereby indicating the birth of a poet.'

I might have replied that such a sext between Mercury and Venus was to be found in my own horoscope, but in the presence of the man whom I regarded as the greatest poet alive I naturally did not venture to proclaim such an aspect.

'An exact sext,' Yeats continued in that rich portentous voice of his.

At that moment Sir Ray Lankester entered the billiard-room and, seeing me in the inglenook, plunged down on the other side, which made that inglenook a pretty close squeeze because Ray Lankester was a man of bulk with a great square head on him that shut out the fire from Yeats and myself. I wanted to introduce the great poet to the great biologist but feared Ray Lankester's gruffness towards a new member and funk'd the possible sequel.

Yeats continued serenely:

'An exact sext between the planet Mercury and the planet Venus.'

'Ah, my dear boy, I'm glad to see you,' Ray Lankester interposed without giving Yeats so much as a glance. 'I was going to write and urge you to introduce green tree-frogs to your island of Herm.'

Yeats resumed, apparently unconscious of a third person: 'In my sixth house the planet Herschell is found in opposition to . . .'

But the name of the malefic planet was lost in Ray Lankester's interruption.

'Some friends of mine on the Riviera keep these delightful little creatures, and it's most enjoyable to sit out on the terrace after dinner and listen to them chirruping to one another in the boughs . . .'

Yeats broke in.

'The Moon in my seventh house indicates as you doubtless know . . .'

'Chirruping and trilling away to one another in the boughs like beautiful little birds.'

'A tendency to spend money rather than to keep it,' Yeats insisted.

Ray Lankester nudged me.

'Who is this fellow on the other side of you?'

'Yeats,' I whispered.

'Who?'

'W. B. Yeats.'

'Um?'

'W. B. Yeats, the Irish poet.'

'Never heard of him. What's he talking about?'

'Astrology.'

'Bloody fool!' ejaculated Sir Ray with all the contempt of an Astronomer Royal.

But fearing it would not stop at that I introduced the

two great men to one another, and I am glad to be able to add that they became very good friends.

A month or two later Yeats was given the Nobel Prize, and Gosse, at his most feline, said to him in front of several members, 'I hope, Yeats, you do not imagine you have been given the Nobel Prize for your poetry.'

Yeats blinked and backed away from the attack.

'Oh no, Yeats, you have been given it on account of your hatred for *us*,' Gosse fizzed catlike as if he were uncorking a bottle of aerated patriotism he had had to keep corked throughout the war for fear of offending Swedish neutrality.

Yeats could only blink, and then it was that Ray Lankester came to his rescue:

'Why can't you leave the poor wild Irishman alone, Gosse?' he protested with a vast magnanimity.

I have no time now to tell a wonderful story of Edmund Gosse's about Wordsworth, and so I shall tell one about Dorothy Wordsworth, which was told me by her great-nephew William Wordsworth the Second.

After the death of his renowned great-uncle whom he closely resembled in appearance and manner and voice, young William used to stay as a boy in his 'teens with his great-aunt Dorothy, and one of his jobs was to drive away curious visitors to Rydal Mount when he was wheeling the old lady about in her wicker-chair. On one occasion two middle-aged women of the type seen in corners of hotels that cater for residents ventured as far as the drive and stood peering at the great poet's house. William expected his aunt to order him as usual to eject the intruders, instead of which to his great surprise she told him to usher them into the presence. William did as he was told and the old lady looked at them.

'Would you like me to read you some of my brother's poetry?' she asked.

'And I've always remembered the reply of one of them,' William the Second told me with a remote chuckle. 'She turned to her companion and said, "How pleasant it is to receive attention from elderly females." I thought that very droll. Then the two visitors waited for my Aunt Dorothy to pick up the volume of my Uncle William's poetry lying in her lap and begin.'

Let me intervene with an excerpt in *Bookman's Holiday* from Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals written on March 17, 1802, at Grasmere.

'William went up into the orchard and finished the poem. I went and sat with W. and walked backwards and forwards in the orchard till dinner-time. He read me his poem. I read to him, and my Beloved slept. A sweet evening as it had been a sweet day, and I walked quietly along the side of Rydal lake with quiet thoughts—the hills and the lake were still—the owls had not begun to hoot, and the little birds had given over singing.'

Perhaps Dorothy Wordsworth over half a century later was thinking about those readings of long ago as she read to these privileged visitors from *The Excursion*, and in reading a few lines of the poem I shall imitate William Wordsworth the Second who modelled his own reading of his great uncle's poetry on his recollections of the original.

*Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,  
With alabaster domes, and silver spires  
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high  
Uplifted; here, serene pavilions bright  
In avenues disposed: there, towers begirt  
With battlements that on their restless fronts  
Bore stars.*

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But alas, the gaze of the two visitors began to wander. They fidgeted. They were not appreciating the attentions of that elderly female in her wicker chair. William the Second related the penalty for such bad manners.

'My Aunt Dorothy<sup>1</sup> suddenly became aware that her visitors were a couple of dolts. She flung the volume at them in a rage. "Go away from here you two horrid old cats. You're not listening to a word of what I'm reading to you. Go out of Rydal Mount at once, and never come here again." '

I expect I'm the last person alive who knows that story of the gentle Dorothy.

<sup>1</sup> William Wordsworth the Second, pronounced it "Durrothy" as his great-uncle did.

# A Retrospect of Flowers

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I HAVE been reading a poet's magical book about wild flowers. That epithet is not intended as a compliment to its learning lightly worn, to the graceful but vigorous prose, to a *most* felicitous use of quotation from the verse of other poets, nor even to the author's ability to convey the excitement of tracking down a rarity, though indeed they would all deserve such a compliment. I call it magical because there is hardly a page which does not conjure up for me the flowery adventures of my own past. Mr. Andrew Young is the magician; his incantation is called *A Prospect of Flowers*. With him the pursuit of wild flowers began in Edinburgh when he was a school-boy at the end of the Victorian age. The first flower that touched his fancy was Speedwell, and Speedwell was my first flowery love. I was still in petticoats then, and though I could not compete with the petticoated Hooker—the great botanist, I mean, not the judicious ecclesiastic—who was discovered by his mother grubbing in a wall for a moss and proclaiming its Latin name, I *could* distinguish a celandine from a buttercup and I should certainly never have allowed a countryman to tell me a Speedwell was a forget-me-not, which was what happened to Mr. Young as a schoolboy. Would that I had taken advantage of that early start! I might not have been so hopelessly outstripped in my knowledge of wild flowers as I have been by Mr. Andrew Young.

I was lucky enough when barely two and a half years old to find myself much in the company of an uncle by



marriage who encouraged my delight in wild flowers by walking with me about the Malvern hills, and teaching me their names. George Crowe (he was a brother of Eyre Crowe the painter) was a bearded man who seemed like the tall Agrippa, 'so tall he almost touched the sky'. He was in fact almost six foot six. By the way, talking of the great Agrippa, has anybody noticed how successfully Hitler has concentrated in himself many of the characters in that hundred-year-old nursery book *Struwwelpeter*, Fidgety Phil, Cruel Frederick, the nasty little boys who jeered at the blackamoor, Augustus who refused to take his soup, Johnny Head-in-air, and Robert who would trust to his umbrella and was finally carried away by it in a squall. Forgive me. I couldn't resist that digression. . . .

I do commend to parents and other grown-ups the duty of encouraging the smallest child to be intelligently interested in flowers. It is easy enough in the case of nine children out of ten, for wild flowers exercise a fairy charm over them. Moreover, unless we have seen small flowers with the eyes of earliest youth we can never see them. The magnifying glass will never be a substitute for such eyes. Even now I can look at a daisy with the vision of long ago when it seemed as big as the moon. The daisy! I shall not dare to say much about the daisy. Mr. Young himself, whose anthology of quotations is as choice a collection of rarities as the flowers he tells us of, cannot resist allowing himself one hackneyed line—the only one, I believe, in all his poetic nosegay. 'Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower.'

Daisies have a subtle scent, too, which fades with innocence to vanish like elfland, denied as it is to the dull noses of maturity. Sam Weller asked if anybody had ever seen a dead donkey. Mr. Young once challenged a company of botanists to produce one of them who had seen a

withered daisy. And neither they nor you nor I have seen a withered daisy.

To childhood the daisy may be the day's eye, but too often it speaks to older people of mortality. Mr. Young quotes some lines of Thomas Hardy which are like the shiver we explain by saying that somebody is sitting on our grave!

*I saw it—pink and white—revealed  
Upon the white and green;  
The white and green was a daisied field  
The pink and white Etheleen.*

*A sense that, in some mouldering year,  
As one they both would lie,  
Made me move quickly on to her,  
To pass the pale thought by.*

But children do not have such pale thoughts. To them the daisy is reassuring as the morning light, and I suppose it is the pleasure that the child has received from the ordinary daisy which can make a first meeting with the ox-eyed daisy such an overwhelming experience. The vision of a field of ox-eyed daisies in profuse bloom on the outskirts of Cromer in the blazing summer of 1887 is one of the outstanding moments of my life. I remember climbing through a wire fence in a palpitation of excitement and plunging down on hands and knees to gaze at those glorious monsters, face to face; and I remember being called back to the road by my tiresome old nurse because I was trespassing and therefore liable to be seized by the magistrate. The outskirts of Cromer at that date were haunted by notice-boards proclaiming that by order of Benjamin B. Bond Cabell trespassers would be prose-

cuted. Mr. Cabell may have been the kindest of men: to my imagination at four years old a rumour that the Giant Blunderbore and the Giant Cormoran had been sighted arm-in-arm at Sheringham would have been less alarming than this goblin shape that seemed to be lurking behind a notice-board in every field and copse round Cromer.

Mr. Young alludes several times to trespassing and boldly declares at the head of one chapter that a person caught trespassing cannot be prosecuted. Yes, that's all very well, but, in his search for rare flowers, Mr. Young *has* obviously been worried once or twice by that business of trespassing. Still, I'm sure he would agree with me that if gamekeepers go the way of dragons and cease to menace youth, youth will have lost something. In Hampshire, where the best hours of my boyhood were spent, there lived a particularly fierce type of gamekeeper, most of them dressed like the gamekeeper of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, in velveteens. There was a glade in the heart of a wood where daffodils grew wild, a visit to which was the first thing I did to celebrate the blessed but so poignantly brief Easter holidays. To reach that glade involved a long walk by winding mossy ways between rathe green hazels . . . to digress again: why has that eloquent word 'rathe' or 'rath' for early—I don't believe anybody knows how Milton pronounced it in front of primrose—become a poetic archaism? Why do we preserve its comparative, 'rather', give it a secondary meaning, and even use it as a slangy affirmative? Rather! So I repeat 'between rathe green hazels'. And then it happened. The menacing figure my brother and I were always expecting round the next bend *was* there this time. 'Birdsnesting, eh?' the gamekeeper demanded fiercely.

Mr. Young points out that to explain he is a botanist (which he insists is not true anyway) produces no effect on a gamekeeper. So it might surprise him to hear that when I explained we had come to look at the daffodils that gamekeeper turned friendly, so friendly that he invited us back to have tea with Mrs. Gamekeeper in a sort of Hansel and Gretel house in the middle of the wood. I hasten to add that no other gamekeeper I encountered was suddenly transformed like this into a good fairy. Why was that particular gamekeeper lulled into benignity by the word 'daffodil'? That, unlike the Song of the Sirens, is beyond conjecture.

Those blessed, all too brief Easter holidays! I reflect now that in the three years of my boyhood's prime they amounted to a mere nine weeks in all, and yet in retrospect those nine weeks seem to hold half of that boyhood in a lovely pattern of birds, flowers, butterflies, and budding trees. The dreadful last day before going back to school was always spent in a field where the first cowslips were in bloom. No emigrant took his last look at the shores of home with a profounder emotion than my last look at those rathe cowslips when the fatal hour of one o'clock struck in a church tower near by and I had to hurry back to dinner, with the odious prospect of packing on the last afternoon of freedom. To this day the sight of cowslips in a field reduces me to the pathetic fallacy, for I perceive them as sentient creatures waving me farewell.

Mr. Young refuses to condemn the pathetic fallacy. 'This fallacious and sinful way I intend to keep,' he declares. 'For all we know it may be better than the negative way in which some people regard them (that is plants) as though they were not living beings at all.' He is not prepared to be frowned out of his attitude even by fellow-

poets. Not for him Browning's Brother Naddo in Sordello, who objected to 'setting up conceits in nature's stead'. Mr. Young would have had Robert Bridges against him too. I remember an occasion when Bridges gave my undergraduate self a lesson on this subject. One morning he bicycled down from Boar's Hill to discuss a second article he was intending to write about the pronunciation of Latin for a review I was then editing called 'The Oxford Point of View'. He was passionately keen that the University authorities should free it from the barbarous English usage of that date, and indeed those articles of his did set in motion the reform from which we benefit to-day.

The poet was dressed as he thought a country gentleman bicycling into Oxford on a fine May morning should be dressed. He wore a tail coat, a pair of white flannel trousers with grey lines, a flowered silk waistcoat of considerable antiquity, a wine-coloured tie pulled through a cameo ring, patent leather shoes inlaid with white buckskin, and . . . a yachting cap. You may think he must have looked eccentric in such a rig-out! but I assure you, such was the noble simplicity of the man, it seemed the perfectly natural rig-out to set off that splendid head. He found me that morning in my digs at 43 High Street with a volume of Herrick, which I laid face downward on a table as I greeted him. 'What's that you're reading? Herrick, eh?' He picked up the volume, frowning as he read out:

*Her eyes g-glowworm lend thee,  
The shooting stars attend thee.*

'Rot!' he growled. 'What eyes has a g-glowworm to lend anybody?' And with this he pitched the volume

contemptuously into a chair. He was rather fond of flinging about books of which he disapproved. I remember visiting him at Boar's Hill when he had just been reading a volume of Courthope's *History of English Literature*. And he flung that the whole length of his library to mark his disapproval of what he called charlatan criticism.

That story about Bridges' disapproval of setting up conceits in nature's stead has led me away from flowers, and now, landed by memory in Oxford, I am in two minds whether to say with Matthew Arnold, 'I know what white, what purple fritillaries', and brag of those myriads of them in the meads of Addison's Walk at Magdalen against Mr. Young's tale of being admitted by a man with a rattling money-box to gather them at a price in a field near Strathfieldsaye, or whether to desert the banks of Isis and Cherwell and follow the stripling Thames through meadowsweet and blue cranesbill as far as Kelmscott. To Kelmscott, I think—where the box that edged the flower-beds was planted between runnels of water, to deter the vampire slugs that always lurk in box and crossings. Mrs. William Morris still presided over the manor when I walked there from Lechlade over forty years ago. She sat under a large umbrella on a pole in the yew parlour, looking more like an elderly creole than a pre-Raphaelite stunner, and she was all the while urging upon her daughter May the importance of being sure that I had enough beer to drink. 'People are very fond of beer on a hot day,' she kept saying, and in fancy I seemed to be visiting Kelmscott at the tail end of a long procession of famous pre-Raphaelites who had all been very fond of beer on such a summer's day as this.

I turn again the pages of Mr. Andrew Young's at once enchanting and enchanted book and realise that much of what I intended to say has not been said. I wanted to

argue that Cuckoo Pint or Wake Robin is called Lords' and Ladies by corruption from Our Lord and Our Lady because some early flower-lover had perceived in that wild arum a similitude to our Lord held in His Mother's arms. I wanted to point out that Ladies' Bedstraw was not Our Lady's coverlet but her mattress, and to praise the scent of that humble yellow flower which, greeting me as I took my first walk by the sea at July's end, I never smell now but I am breathing in again the glorious freedom of the summer holidays. I wanted to expatiate luxuriously on the hot almond-scent of gorse or whin and on the joy of lying on the grass beside it and listening to the elfin musketry of seed pods bursting in the sun. And Menziesia Purpurea! With awe I read that Mr. Young has seen it upon that hill in Atholl which, except for the Shiant Islands that once were mine, is the only place in Britain where that Lusitanian heath is found, having reached this land of ours by way of Lyonesse, one may suppose or from the lost Atlantis. Alas, I never succeeded in finding it myself upon the Shiant Islands whose wild beauty you may see pictured in Sacheverell Sitwell's book *Splendours and Miseries*. But of Menziesia Purpurea and of many another rare plant you must read for yourselves in *A Prospect of Flowers*.

Let me insist, however, that accompanying the author on his wanderings all over England and Scotland in search of rarities is but one of many delights this book offers. Mr. Young says that primrose, speedwell and daisy do not mean to him what they once meant, which I agree is the inevitable price of having eaten with Adam of the 'forbidden learned tree'. I too must now say to the flowers I first beheld with the eyes of innocence what Clare said to the cowslip:

A RETROSPECT OF FLOWERS

*'But I'm no more akin to thee,  
A partner of the spring;  
For time has had a hand with me,  
And left an alter'd thing.'*

Mr. Young, in defiance of the pathetic fallacy, could claim the cowslip's compassion. I could *not*; for I have not written about flowers with that magical pen of his which restores the reader to youth, so that if ever he smelt it he will smell again that subtle perfume of the daisy, and if ever he saw them he will see again the blue eyes of speedwell twinkling at him as once upon a time.



# In Praise of Cricket

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Just after it had been settled that I should celebrate the eighty-second issue of *Wisden's Cricketer's Almanack* by talking about cricket, I happened to read one of those delightful fourth leaders in *The Times* in which a tribute was paid to the eloquence cricket had inspired in so many English writers. And I feel chastened. I feel that cricket has already been supremely well sung and that I have neither the knowledge nor the skill to add anything worth hearing. However, here's old *Wisden* at eighty-two, whom I first bought before he was thirty and used to say over to myself like a breviary year in year out all through the 'nineties. I'm under the impression that a very fat *Wisden* cost only two bob in those days. To-day a *Wisden* thinned by the austerity of war costs six and sixpence. That'll test the pockets of schoolboys even in these days of alleged schoolboy affluence. A. C. Maclaren was a young cricketer of the year in one of those *Wisdens* of long ago! In this year's almanack I read his obituary. From a week or two more than just exactly fifty years ago this evening comes back to me a summer evening in 1895. We were playing in a recreation ground made out of some wasteland near the playing fields of St. Paul's. The great clock of the school was gleaming golden in the westering sun. A figure was shouting and waving by the Gliddon Road gate just where to-day stands the entrance to a block of modern flats. We went across to inquire into the cause of such excitement. 'Archie Maclaren has made 424 not out against Somerset.' 'Liar!' we exclaimed unanimously. Ah, what a pity that we do not preserve

that fine scepticism of youth but with age become credulous embroiderers of the most idle rumour. 'Liar!' we repeated. 'No, really, you chaps, it's not a bung. My governor read it in an evening paper. It was at Taunton. 424. It's a record.' 'A. E. Stoddart made 485,' I pointed out, for I was not prepared to have my Middlesex hero ousted from fame by a Lancashire man. 'Yes, but that was only for Hampstead in a club match. This is first-class cricket.' 'Somerset hasn't been a first-class county very long,' I insisted. But of course this was mere partisan criticism. I went home that evening to my Latin elegiacs or my Greek prose in a glory of record worship. Even the achievement of the immortal W. G. Grace in making 1,000 runs during the previous May was dimmed for a while by this stupendous new record. We had all of us stumped up our bobs for the *Daily Telegraph's* shilling testimonial fund to W.G., but if we had been called upon to stump up another bob to show our admiration of that 424 of Archie Maclaren's we would willingly have done so. And now Archie Maclaren bats on a perfect wicket in the Elysian Playing Fields.

We were mad about cricket and cricketers in the 'nineties. And what heroes we had to go mad over! It's impossible to imagine nowadays the publication of three or four weeklies all about cricket, not to mention the serial issue of photographs of famous cricketers which youth pored upon more ardently than youth pores upon any pin-up girl of to-day.

Nevertheless, even in its brilliant prime what seemed the absolute secure supremacy of cricket was threatened by the growing attraction of Association football. I look back to the Scarborough cricket week of 1896. I cannot remember what the matches were, but the heroes were most of them there in battle array. I see through the

field-glasses of memory the great moustache of the Demon Spofforth. By the way, there is a splendid photograph of the Demon Australian Bowler in Sir Pelham Warner's *Book of Cricket* which was first published in 1911 and now appears in 1915 revised for the fourth time. Of course, Spofforth was long past his greatness when I saw him at Scarborough, and he was too plump to look Mephistophelian any longer, but who would not have bragged if he could have seen Achilles or Hector on the fringe of middle-age? I see J. J. Ferris, another great Australian bowler, who was playing for Gloucestershire in 1896. A dapper little man with a black waxed moustache, as I remember, and a terrific overarm action. It was he who with the mighty C. T. B. Turner bowled out the English batsmen in that sopping year 1888. I did not see either of them at their work, but I had my own excitements for a five-year-old in 1888. I was in a hansom-cab of which a wheel came off in Grosvenor Gardens. What a smash! I found a ten-shilling piece by the booking-office at Victoria Station and received my first lesson in worldly wisdom when I proclaimed my discovery as a golden farthing and my father muttered, 'Put your foot on it, you little fat-head, and pick it up quickly', and when as we walked toward the train he told me not to announce such discoveries aloud because anybody standing by was likely to claim such a coin as his own. I did not see Ferris and Turner bowling at Lord's in that year 1888, but I did see a rain of frogs at Eridge and I did have the grim pleasure of reading in the papers all about Jack the Ripper with regrettable results for my nocturnal peace of mind.

Back to cricket in 1896. I see the dark and handsome Tom Richardson and the fair and handsome George Lohmann—demigods of Surrey both of them. I see the exact angle of the chocolate Surrey cap on the head of

W. W. Read, the lob-bowler who was much loved by boys in their early teens, perhaps because there were many of them still so near to the underarm deliveries of their cricket beginnings. I see the tall figure and long-chinned face of William Gunn, but whether Arthur Shrewsbury was his partner I do not remember. Anyway, the batting became slow to a schoolboy's taste and my eyes wandering as I sat in the pavilion I suddenly perceived a football match in progress on a neighbouring ground. My host was an enthusiastic young cricketer who regarded the Scarborough week as the most solemn occasion of the year, and when he saw my eyes wandering from the classical batting of William Gunn to look at twenty-two football players in blue and crimson profaning the September sunshine with their barbarian antics, he treated my behaviour as sacrilege. He said that if I *must* watch a game of football for goodness' sake to go and watch it, but not from the pavilion of the Scarborough cricket ground in the Scarborough Week. I had the grace to divine his mortification and the grace to feel mortified myself by having made him feel so mortified. What I did not apprehend was that the fact of having been more entertained by the performance of some third-rate footballers than by the classic strokes of William Gunn was a sign that the popular fancy would presently take the same direction for an intelligent schoolboy of thirteen will serve as a common denominator for the intelligence of the multitude.

And there was another game which threatened cricket—not by its greater appeal to the multitude but, perhaps more seriously, by the spoiling of so many young cricketers. Need I explain that I refer to golf? I am inclined to think that golf was deliberately encouraged in England by the country of its origin in the same spirit

as Circe and Calypso helped to beguile Odysseus from the job of getting home to Ithaca after his demobilization. Ten years seems a preposterous time to have taken, even to us familiar with the horrors of contemporary railway travel. Golf! I remember seeing in 1902 six cricket blues packed into one of the rare motor cars then at the disposal of undergraduates on their way to play golf at Hinksey and, as they drove off, I remember hearing a senior man observe: 'That infernal game is going to ruin University cricket.' Surely nobody who has studied the melancholy records of University cricket for the last quarter of a century will try to discredit that prophecy. And we can see the disastrous effects of early golf far beyond Oxford or Cambridge cricket. Oh yes, of course, there are glorious exceptions, but they *are exceptions*, and it's not just idle laudation of the past to maintain that the Golden Age of cricket has happened. Whatever the cause, cricket is not what it was, either as an expression of our national life or as an influence upon it, and I do not believe that future readers of *Wisden* will ever be able to rejoice in the return of that Golden Age.

Village cricket is still a much more generous display of human competition than contract bridge or golf or professional football, but the externals have suffered from material progress. We were much nearer at the beginning of this century to the spirit of that immortal match played in Muggleton than we can possibly get anywhere to-day. We knew then just how that cold roast beef and draught ale and cheese tasted to the Pickwickians. We could have gloated beforehand with Alfred Jingle, Esq., of No Hall, Nowhere, upon the capital spread that was waiting for the players. We knew the sound of horses' hooves upon the kindlier roads of the past: we were not transported to that bright field in a motor omnibus. We travelled with

the butterflies and the birds in a waggonette. Bourton-on-the-Water, Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton-in-the-Marsh—what drives they were from Burford once upon a time! That deliberate prologue and sometimes, I must confess, what seemed that rather too protracted epilogue when we had lost the match and rain had set in with the westering of the sun . . . still, memory like the gnomon of the dial records only the bright hours and looking back now across forty years I cannot recall so clearly the rain on the back of my neck as the warmth of the sun. I remember in the year 1904 choosing for the colours of the Burford Cricket Club lilac and apple-green. I wonder if what at the time struck some of my fellow-members as an exotic combination has long since been replaced by prosaic red and blue or autumnal yellow and brown. I expect so.

But my cricket memories of the heart of England go back farther than 1904 at least another decade to what I suppose I can fairly call my first match as distinct from games between two sides at my private school, for I was never anywhere near being considered a candidate even for the third eleven at Colet Court, and this was the only match in which I played until the form-matches of St. Paul's, when so crowded was the field that short-leg in one match could often indulge in a conversation with mid-off in the match next door; and the side cheering two of their batsmen running for four would often have to lower their heads in a sudden silence as a ball whizzed over in a drive from another game altogether. This first match of mine was played at Broadway in Worcestershire between a team of visitors of two years either side of eleven and a team of equally youthful residents. I have so little to brag of in my cricketing career that I must be forgiven for bragging about the six wickets I took at the age of nine or ten for the visitors with what I believed at

the time was a wonderful new way of bowling but which was, I learnt later, nothing more novel than the half-volley. Luckily the youthful residents of Broadway had never experienced the half-volley and they gave a lamentable display of really bad batting. In that same match I made two catches at cover point, one of which nobody on the ground expected me to hold. I didn't expect to hold it myself, but with it the match was won and I retired from the field to enjoy for the first and the last time in my life an authentic triumph in the domain of sport. From that day it was my habit to inform the captain of any side on which I played that my place in the field was cover, and it was at cover that I made my last catch at cricket. The occasion was a match between H.M.S. *Skirmisher* and members of the Aegean Intelligence Service in the summer of 1917 upon the Island of Syra in the Cyclades. It was a blazing afternoon. The Intelligence Service had given a feeble display of batting on a parched piece of ground where even the pitch had a slight cast and the fielders were either about three feet below or above the batsmen. The Skirmishers were knocking our bowlers about pretty well as they liked. One of them cut a beauty toward cover, a real express, but the tilt of the ground made it a possible catch, and somehow I held it. As I chucked the ball back to the bowler I saw that my left hand was covered with blood: it was split right up the palm. That was the end of my cricket. I never played again. Pale hands above, pale hands I love, sang the poetess, but not at cover point.

One kind of cricket match, however, I still play as I played it long ago to wile away the tedium of Caesar or Cicero in class. Crossword puzzles of the less ferocious type and a patience like Miss Milligan soothe the tired imagination, but sometimes even they are too intellectual

## IN PRAISE OF CRICKET

and the mind demands an almost mechanical diversion. This can be gained from book cricket. You pick your teams and score with alternate words, treating them as overs—two runs for a vowel, one for a consonant. The same letters doubled puts a batsman out. So do three or more consonants together. The new batsman carries on with the rest of the word or over. He may be bowled first ball. For instance the word is 'lessee'. The batsman is outed by the double 's' and the new batsman coming in is outed without scoring by the double 'e'. Of course you can add your own variations to the rules. It's a capital game and one of my favourite bits of team-picking is by the alphabet. The H's of cricketers past and present give much the most powerful side on paper. What about this?

Hayward, Hobbs, Hutton, Hammond, Hearne (J. W.), Hendren, K. L. Hutchings, Hirst, Huish, Haigh, Hearne (J. T.).

Every member of that side except Haigh gets a first class in Sir Pelham Warner's Honour School of Cricket which you'll find in his book. No other letter can supply a full team, and thirteen of the great cricketers beginning with H who have been omitted from that team of H's. The next strongest letter is T.

Well, book cricket may be only an echo of the sound of ball on bat, of the wicket-keeper's appeal and the umpire's decision, but anyway, it's not an anti-social game like contract bridge.



# Memories of Savoy Hill

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THE first time I broadcast was in 1923—not so far away now from thirty years ago. I had recently started a monthly magazine called *The Gramophone*, and the BBC invited me to play a selection of gramophone records for a quarter of an hour and comment on them. The time chosen was one o'clock—no one o'clock news in those days!—and the place was Savoy Hill, the London headquarters of the BBC, then known as 2LO. All broadcasting was done in a single large studio, with lots of people moving about from whom silence was demanded when the microphone was 'live'.

'Where's your script?' asked whoever it was that was directing the broadcast. I told him I had not got a script. 'But you can't broadcast without a script. You'll dry up. People get microphone fright.' I said I was used to talking without notes and did not think I should be nervous. 'Oh, well,' said the director, 'we must hope for the best. Anyway, it won't matter much if you do dry up because the only people listening at one o'clock will be the women washing up.'

'Now, it's quite simple really,' I was assured. 'Don't be nervous. Just imagine that an old friend of yours is sitting in that arm-chair and talk to this imaginary friend in exactly the same voice you would use if a friend was really sitting there. Don't bother about the gramophone. You'll hand me the record you want played when you're ready for it.'

Just before the broadcast was going to start, a Sunday-school treat escorted by a clergyman arrived in the studio

to be shown how broadcasting was done. 'Do you mind very much if these children sit at the other end of the studio while you're doing your broadcast?' I was asked. 'You'll have your back to them.' I said I thought the sense of an audience actually present would be welcome, and the broadcast started. I hope the women washing up enjoyed those old records more than the men washing up to-day enjoy the one o'clock news.

All too soon 2LO became a memory of jolly amateurs. The old all-in studio vanished and talkers were housed in small studios, one or two of which were lined with the backs of books to give them a suitable scholarly background and encourage the talker to feel the solemnity of his job. At first the speaker always had the clock behind him which meant cricking the neck as one looked rapidly round to see if one's broadcast was lagging behind the time allowed for it.

In those days the announcers had to wear dinner jackets and look the part as well as speak it. One evening I said to one of these grave and impressive figures: 'I suppose there's a technical reason for putting the clock behind the speaker?' 'No, I don't think it matters where the clock is,' he replied. 'It doesn't? Well, wouldn't it be better if the talker could see the clock without cricking his neck?' 'Oh, that's a very good idea.' And soon after this the clocks were moved within sight of the broadcaster. I like to believe I was responsible for that change.

Then there was compèring in those days. The compère of to-day, comfortably isolated from the orchestra in front of his own microphone, does not know what an ordeal it used to be for the pioneers. The compère had to sit among the members of the orchestra, from which he emerged to bend over and speak into a microphone hung about eighteen inches above the floor. I remember I was

once compèring a performance of old Alhambra ballet-tunes, seated among the violoncellos and trying to get out of the way of their ardent bowing. Before each new tune I would have to come out and say something like this:

'And now here is a melody that will bring back to many old listeners wonderful evenings at the Alhambra when they leant back in those gloriously comfortable fauteuils with a good cigar and watched that great ballerina . . .' and so on. You know the kind of thing. Well, as the programme went on, it became more and more difficult to bend down to within eighteen inches of the floor and in that position suggest the luxury and ease of the Edwardian decade.

'I suppose there's a technical reason why the microphone is only eighteen inches above the floor?' I asked.

'No, I don't think so,' said the announcer.

'Then wouldn't it be easier for the speaker if it was level with his mouth?'

Let me remind you of the time when Bach cantatas were *de règle* for Sunday afternoon. It was idle for listeners to write indignant letters and say they resented their only afternoon for listening being given over to Bach cantatas. The powers that were at Savoy Hill would not yield, and so Bach cantatas continued. Then people started listening to light music sponsored by advertisers on the Continent, and it was decided to try the experiment of breaking the Sabbath with something more secular than Bach cantatas all the time. So my sister Fay Compton and myself were invited to give a Shakespeare reading for an hour between two cantatas. We chose for our reading the nunnery scene from *Hamlet*, the death scene from *Antony and Cleopatra*, the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, and lastly the scene between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth after the murder of Duncan.

When Lady Macbeth goes off to gild the faces of the grooms with blood, Macbeth is left alone, tremulous after the dread deed he has done, and there is a knock. I rapped on the table at the rehearsal and went on with Macbeth's speech:

*'Whence is that knocking?  
How is't with me, when every noise appals me?  
What bands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes!  
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.'*

At this moment, instead of Lady Macbeth coming back from gilding the faces of the grooms with blood, Stuart Hibberd came in looking as if he had committed a murder. 'You mustn't rap the table like that,' he gasped. 'The engineers say the noise is appalling.' 'Well, my dear Stuart, I really can't say "knocking within" every time there's a knock at the door. It'll ruin the scene.'

After a short discussion Hibberd went off to find out from the engineers what, if any, noise could be made to represent knocking. Presently he came back with a small cardboard paper basket, which he tapped solemnly. 'The engineers say this is all right for them. Is it all right for you?' 'Well, it doesn't sound to me much like knocking at the south entry, but if the engineers think it does, I'll take their word for it.' 'Oh, splendid,' said Hibberd. 'I'll hold the paper basket in front of me and when you nod I'll tap it for the knock.' And so it was arranged.

Those were the days before the lovable Brian Michie and one or two others had started the effects room where 'noises off' could be made without upsetting the engineers.

It was first used on the grand scale in Eric Maschwitz's radio adaptation of my novel *Carnival*.

One morning I was rung up at my club from Savoy Hill to say that by an oversight the Channel Islands had been omitted from a series of holiday broadcasts. Could I do a quarter of an hour's talk about them that evening after the six o'clock news? I said that I had not a moment all day in which to write a talk but that if they would let me do it impromptu I would come to Savoy Hill and do my best. There was a pause and then a voice said: 'Well, nobody has ever been allowed to do anything like that, but' . . . another pause . . . 'well, all right, we'll risk it, and announce the talk in the six o'clock news.'

When I reached the studio I found two girls with notebooks sitting one on each side of the table. 'What are these for?' I asked. 'They're the two stenographers to take down your talk for the *Radio Times*. The presses are being held until your copy reaches them.'

It was a pretty nervous quarter of an hour. I knew that in Guernsey and Jersey grim-faced Guernseymen and Jersey men were sitting with watches in their hands to hear whether either island was given as much as five seconds longer than the other. I am glad to remember that each got exactly seven minutes, with a minute for Sark, and that the *Radio Times* was able to go to press with that talk. But I felt as anxious as the girl in Longfellow's poem, swinging on the bell and saying, 'Curfew shall not ring to-night.'

# A Passage to India

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THE pattern of my life woven by destiny did not provide for my passage to India until I was approaching the end of my sixty-fifth year. Too late, some of my listeners will be thinking. A man in his mid-sixties should be contemplating not a passage to India for the first time but the title of another of E. M. Forster's novels—*The Longest Journey*. By sixty-five a man has ceased to be impressionable beneath the surface of his mind; he cannot become an intrinsic part of whatever fresh and exotic scene in which he may find himself; he will regard it as he regards the unrolling of a cinematographic film. Well, of course, that is largely true—and I am quite willing to be told, as I was told so often by old British residents in India, that I couldn't hope to begin to understand anything about India in the course of a few months inasmuch as they who had spent their lives there were still baffled by the chasm that divided the East from the West. Had not Rudyard Kipling made it clear in two lines of verse that East was East and West was West without the faintest prospect of either of them ever meeting?

Nevertheless, with what may seem a presumptuous and absurd revelation of superficiality, throughout my months in India I was much more aware of similarity than of difference and I could not help wondering whether during the long association between Britain and India both of them did not lose a great deal by accepting that incompatibility of East and West as a natural law. The future of the world offers a poor look out for mankind if we are going to surrender to such a belief.

Many years ago I heard the late Jam Saheb of Nawanagar, speaking at a public banquet in Ireland, say how much the people of Galway reminded him of his own people at home, and when I first met the Mahrattas on my way south from Poona I was continually being reminded of the Highlanders of Scotland. However, more significant for me than trying to seek comparisons of that kind is the fact that nowhere in India did I ever receive anything but a warm response to my own goodwill. 'We have lost India for want of a please and a thank you,' a distinguished General of the Indian Army observed to me soon after I landed in Bombay. The supreme achievement of Lord Mountbatten was his ability to convince the people of India that Great Britain was abdicating with good will, and who that was close to the centre of events during that fateful spring and summer of 1947 could have been anything but profoundly moved by the warmth of that Indian response? I recall a particular instance in October of that year. The Lawrence School at Sanawar was celebrating its centenary, which Lord and Lady Mountbatten had promised to attend when it fell due in August but which, owing to the difficulties that accompanied the transfer of responsibility in the West and East Punjab, was postponed until October. I was invited to drive over from Simla to take part in the celebration to which the Mountbattens were coming direct from New Delhi. There was a certain amount of uneasiness about their future among some of the British residents still in Simla, an uneasiness that in a few cases I must call hysterical. One or two people who should have known better warned me against the folly of driving unescorted through those twenty miles or so to Sanawar, but by that time I had been long enough in India to believe I was entitled to judge for myself what excursions I could make.

So under a tranquil blue October sky my secretary and I drove through the lovely hill country to Sanawar. In the afternoon when the commemoration was over, the Mountbattens had arranged to drive on to Simla and our car followed theirs. There was no escort, no fuss of any kind, and dusk was falling fast when we reached the outskirts of Simla. In the old days—I am tempted to call them if not the bad old days at any rate the foolish old days—the Mall at Simla was reserved for the promenades of Europeans. That prohibition having vanished, the Mall was full of the people to whom the Mall really belonged. As the Governor-General's car arrived, crawling along through the dense crowd, the Governor-General himself was recognized and there was a surge of popular enthusiasm. Amid cries of 'Mountbatten ki jai', Lord Mountbatten stood up to receive that spontaneous welcome and I realized how perfectly he was able to convey not only the goodwill he himself was feeling but also the desire of the great majority of British people to recognize India as a friend in the future on terms of mutual respect and what was even more valuable, of affection.

At that date hardly any of us ventured to *hope*, much less to believe, that India would remain in the Commonwealth. Writing home to a very important political personage at that time, I said, 'Apparently the only person here who believes that India will remain in the Commonwealth is Mountbatten, but he believes it so fervidly that I cannot help believing it too.'

I recall sitting with the Governor-General on the lawn of the old Viceregal Lodge in Simla when he suddenly observed, 'I'm not really a good polo player, but I always believe that my side is going to win, and you know, I'm nearly always right. And I think I'm going to be right about India.'



It was a tremendous experience to be in India at that historic moment. It is the fashion in certain political circles now to talk as if the whole mighty operation was carried through in such ill-considered haste that widespread disaster was barely avoided. The last thing I would try to do is to gloss over the events in the Punjab. Nevertheless, when one reflects upon the horrors of inhumanity almost all over the world which have sometimes made the twentieth century seem like a bloodstained phantom of a century returning from what Shakespeare called 'the dark backward and abysm of time', I maintain that any fair-minded man would recognize that what happened in the Punjab immediately after the abdication of the British Raj might have been much more terrible if the influence of the saintly Mahatma Gandhi had not prevailed over unloosed passions that at one moment seemed uncontrollable. You will probably think that I am being extravagant when I couple with that man of God as an influence of reconciliation the old Indian Army. Nevertheless, I believe that I am affirming a simple truth. Call that old Indian Army an army of mercenaries if you will, but when you do, remember at the same time that in the long, long chronicle of humanity at war no army's record of duty, discipline and valour has been less stained by inhumanity. And give a thought to those British officers whose occupation is now gone but whose hearts still beat for that army of mercenaries they loved so wisely and so well. For many months I have spent hour after hour with the glorious records of that army and I have a right, with all humility, to bid a free India cherish the example of that army of mercenaries. I have a notion that the Roman legions of long ago were wrought out of similar metal, and I do not exaggerate when I assert that I never fully apprehend the reason why Rome was able

to rule the western world so long until at home in the quiet of my library I could meditate upon the experience I had been granted by that passage to India. In the moral influence of the Indian Army to-day during the years ahead of us I place unbounded trust.

I must not leave you with the impression that I spent all my time in India in military cantonments or official residencies. I covered many hundreds of miles by train and by road, and wherever I went in India, in Nepal, in Assam, in Arakan during the months before the Republic of India and the Dominion of Pakistan became history, my imagination was continuously stimulated by the evidences of the past, by the scene of the present, but above all by the prospect of the future. So many European travellers in India are inclined to dwell on the differences of creed, of language, of caste, and of race. Yet, whether I were being entertained in some kindly Dogra household near Dharmasala, in a Punjab village near Jullundur, or in a luxurious guesthouse in Mysore, whether I were listening to the laughter of the Manipuri women in the market-place of Imphal, or being driven by a grave Sikh down some sizzling road in Calcutta or sailing to the Elephanta Caves from Bombay or in the pearly morning mist crossing the mighty Brahmaputra to Pandu, whether I was walking in the thronged streets of Ahmedabad or sitting on the veranda of the Director's bungalow near Jamshedpur to watch the smoke of the blast furnaces seven miles away, and meeting dark aborigines carrying their burdens—aborigines who still used bows and arrows within a few miles of the largest steel works in the Commonwealth—wherever I was and whatever the violence of the contrasts in this great country, I was always aware of an intrinsic unity. And when somebody has travelled so far and wide as I have, amid such diversity

of peoples and natural conditions, he can only regard with awe the achievement of that General Election which has recently been carried through with an authoritative dignity beyond praise. Such an achievement is the proclamation of a faith in democracy by which all of us the whole world round who, in spite of the discouragement of this time of ours, hold fast to democracy, have been inspired with a new fervour for our own faith.

I shall be dust long before that future India of which Mr. Nehru dreams is an accomplished fact for the rest of the world to admire, but if my passage to India has left me with my faith in democracy confirmed, I venture to think that voyage was as profitable for me as any voyage for silk and ivory and spices was for the European mariners that first sailed across the Indian Ocean almost five centuries ago. Therefore I avail myself of this opportunity to thank the people of India for what they have taught me about the potentiality of man. I came back to this small green island of ours spiritually enriched, and though I may be only one unimportant individual I cannot but believe that many from the west in ever increasing numbers during the years to come will gain from India a spiritual enrichment.

If we surrender to the belief that East is East and West is West and accept the incompatibility between them as eternal and unsurmountable, then indeed the look out for mankind is dark despair. But we shall not surrender to that belief. We shall learn as we have learnt before, though the lesson may seem forgotten in this age of armament and fear, that the dayspring of humanity's hopes has always risen and always will rise in the East.

When I left India my Dogra bearer brought me to the boat his most treasured possession—a green and white

## A PASSAGE TO INDIA

chequered quilt faintly perfumed with leaves. I never look at that quilt without thinking of Gulaba Ram's endless patience and courtesy to me, and from that green and white chequered quilt all India speaks to my heart.

# The Festive Spirit

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I HOPE that Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the greater part of England will not accuse me of undue fondness if I seem to suggest that the heart of the Festival of Britain beats in London. It is on an occasion like this that the man who was born there, the man who, like myself, was educated there, and the man who for some reason or other has lived there for most of his life, realizes how dear London is to him. And at this minute the lover of London who shared in the ordeal of the old City during the last war, or even watched it from a safe distance, must be filled with affectionate pride in London's achievement. I look back on literature for the first expression of the festive spirit in London and I find it in that gathering of Canterbury pilgrims at Southwark immortalized by Geoffrey Chaucer. Six and a half centuries ago, in a kindlier April than we were granted this year, those pilgrims set out to enjoy themselves, and there is not one of them in whom we do not recognize prototypes of somebody we know to-day, and most of these Canterbury pilgrims, after they had recovered from their first surprise at the externals of the South Bank in 1911 compared with what they were in 1390, would have joined the crowd of average Londoners and felt perfectly at home.

But the display of London's festive spirit in the past I should like most to have seen was when King Charles II came from Canterbury by way of Blackheath and Southwark and reached Whitehall at seven o'clock on that May evening in 1660. It seems to me a great pity that we no

longer celebrate the glorious Restoration on May 29th. What a night that must have been!

The first great festival occasion I recall in London is the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. I was four and a half, and a day or two before the event I managed to lose myself in Kensington Gardens. I found myself alone in what seemed a boundless desert of greenery near Kensington Palace and I rushed off in a panic out of the gardens and along Kensington High Street to the Police Station, which stands to-day exactly as it stood sixty-four years ago with the same lamp over the door, though the blue buses that always stopped opposite to take on a third horse for the pull up Church Street have long since vanished. The wide crossing seemed the most dangerous I had ever tried to negotiate; my heart was beating fast and tears were very near when I reached the Police Station. There by the charge counter I announced: 'My name is Edward Montague Compton Mackenzie and I live at 54 Avonmore Road, West Kensington. Will you please take me home?' All the policemen were in shirt sleeves on that blazing June day, which was a great astonishment to me because I had never imagined that any policeman ever took his tunic off. One of them lifted me up and set me on the counter where I repeated my request, and then a burly, young, fair-haired policeman hoisted me on to his shoulder and carried me home on it on that blazing June day all the way down Kensington High Street, stopping from time to time to point out the decorations on either side—the royal monograms and wreaths and likenesses of Queen Victoria in gas-jets waiting to be illuminated on the great night. These illuminations would seem dim and dull to the children of to-day who have enjoyed the spectacle of the South Bank glittering at night with ravishing colours and defying the harsh May weather

to damp or chill them. Nevertheless, there may be a few older people who will remember the excitement of watching the lamplighter starting at dusk to light the night-lights in the fairy lamps that used to glimmer in blue and red and amber along the flower borders of the pleasure gardens of seaside resorts, and I daresay some of those older people will agree with me that all the wonders of electricity have never produced anything to equal those fairy lamps of our youth. But of course that's just being sentimental. The children of to-day will carry for years the memory of the South Bank in 1551, and when the year 2000 arrives (or will it be called twenty hundred?) one or two of them will be broadcasting a claim for the South Bank against whatever festival the second millennium can produce.

Well, it may be rash to attempt a prophecy, but I doubt if those who fifty years hence find themselves walking round an exhibition anywhere on the banks of the Thames will be seeing a more remarkable display than they can see now in their youth. I had the luck while walking round South Bank to run into a party of school-boys from Islington, and their eyes were so lit with interest and excitement that one had the impression that the sun was shining at last. The place is a paradise for boys and girls, and the stimulating effect of South Bank on the youthful imagination would alone be enough to justify the enterprise. It is not my job to describe the Dome of Discovery or the Lion and Unicorn Hall or anything else, but I can testify that never in my life have I seen so many people so profoundly interested by what they were looking at. I did not observe one listless sight-seer. As you know, apart from the ever-enthralling river, the site of the heart of the Festival is not ideal from the point of view of beautiful surroundings, and something

like a miracle of gay workmanship has been achieved. If only the weather will behave itself this summer and live up to the name of Dr. Merryweather, whose meteorological sciences can be studied in the Dome of Discovery, a visit to the South Bank will be as bracing and inspiring as a combination of a tour round the commonwealth with a visit to the seaside and the expedition of a field club and the study of a super-encyclopædia illustrated by living pictures. Honestly, it really is terrific. As we drove from the streaming flags and the leaping fountains, from the colour and the music and the flowers, we passed down a street of small poverty-marked houses, and in the window of one of these I saw three little paper Union Jacks such as you stick in a cake at a children's party, and I knew that the people inside that little house were rejoicing in the Festival and glad to show their pride in it by displaying those three little flags. And it seemed to me that they were the spirit of that London which was able to take it, of that dauntless old London which had seen Chaucer's jolly pilgrims set out for Canterbury, which had danced and shouted and sung for the restoration of its king, which had gone wild with festive mirth on Mafeking night and on Armistice night, and which had saluted with affectionate joy the Golden Jubilee and the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary, and the weddings of princes and princesses.

Yes, if I wanted to find a symbol of London's festive spirit I would choose those three little paper Union Jacks in the window of that monotonous poverty-touched street close to the splendour and variety of South Bank.

However, we must not forget the opportunity that the Pleasure Gardens and Fun Fair in Battersea Park will afford for a manifestation of the festive spirit. Any dis-



appointment caused by their not being open at the same time as the South Bank Festival can be forgotten in the knowledge that if they had been open, this outrageous May weather would have cast an icy damper on the opening. And although the Fun Fair will be open to-night the Pleasure Gardens are still a treat in store. And what a treat! Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and Cremorne are but names to us to-day, and except for the middle-aged, Earls Court and the White City are now but names. London needs a pleasure garden. Pleasure gardens, large and small, have been a feature of London life back to the Middle Ages, and it is only since the First Great War that London has not possessed a single pleasure garden. Oh yes, there are dog tracks and football grounds galore, but if the festive spirit of our beloved London is to be worthily cherished there must be a pleasure garden, and I tell you to-night that however delightful you may imagine this Battersea pleasure garden will be you are going to find it much more delightful than anything you have imagined.

I can read of the fireworks and lights and groves and arbours of Vauxhall, but I can remember the enchanted world that Earls Court offered to youth in what I must assure you was from youth's point of view the extremely dull decade of the 'nineties. The finest present that an uncle could give his nephew in the 'nineties was a season ticket to Earls Court: it cost half a guinea. Captain Boyton's water carnival and shooting the chute! Buffalo Bill and his cowboys rescued the mail coach pursued by Indians round and round the arena! And the Great Wheel! I can remember watching from my bedroom window in Avonmore Road the Great Wheel rising month by month above the rooftops to its three hundred feet. It took one twenty minutes to travel round it in what seemed a number of suspended railway carriages with a marvellous

view of London. Once the wheel stopped and the passengers had to stay in it all night, those whose carriages had reached the top wondering if they would ever tread terra firma again. However, next morning the mechanism was restored, and after being given breakfast the passengers were each presented with five golden pounds to compensate them for their fright. We used to sink our shillings on trips round the great wheel very much as shillings are sunk in football pools in the hope that the wheel would stop again and give us five pounds. It never did.

I can even remember the appearance of Olympia before the glass had been put on the roof. That was in the 'eighties when the Hammersmith Road was full of gardens and the road to Kew ran through orchards all the way.

Venice in London when Olympia was flooded and we had magical trips in gondolas round the canals. Constantinople in London when Olympia remained flooded and we enjoyed equally magical trips on the Bosphorus. We needed both to relieve the tedium of school in those dull 'nineties to which a later age has attributed a meretricious romance.

It was obvious to me after a visit to the still unfinished pleasure garden of Battersea Park that contemporary youth is going to enjoy something twice as good as Earls Court and the White City in one, and I think it is safe to add Vauxhall and Cremorne.

However, it is not my job to speculate about even the immediate future of the festive spirit, and so I shall leave the grottoes and pavilions and theatres of the Battersea pleasure garden to welcome that spirit when they are ready for it. Of one place it has clearly taken possession, and that is the Festival Hall. I was a little apprehensive before I attended my first concert there, because to me

the outside is not prepossessing. In fact I thought it looked rather like a railway station. But inside! Well, it's like being in some immense musical instrument, and although I never saw any orchestra so visually effective as an entity as the orchestra appears there, the audience seems to be an integral part of that orchestra. It is beyond the power of words, or at any rate of any words I can conjure, to evoke the atmosphere of a concert in this Festival Hall. It is something which you must make a personal experience of your own, and grateful as I am for that experience I cannot help envying those who will enjoy that experience for the first time when they are young. I feel that this Festival Hall of music is going to play a vital part in our national future, and just because I do feel that so strongly I hesitate to say more lest I seem to be trying to communicate a dream, to do which is usually a rather tiresome piece of egotism. On either side of the great auditorium there are twelve boxes which project themselves over the stalls without visible support and the effect of sitting in one of these boxes is to feel that one is sustained only by the music and by the response to that music of the large audience. To listen thus as I did the other night to Elgar's *Cockaigne Overture* was to be in communion with the heart of London, and to be in communion with the heart of London is to hear the music of humanity. And as one crosses Waterloo Bridge and sees the crowds closely packed along the parapets to gaze at the lights of the Festival and the illuminated river and the silvery wraith of St. Paul's Cathedral and the other floodlit buildings, one is aware almost of a rapture of enjoyment.

# How I Work

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You all know the advantage of sleeping on a disagreeable or imprudent letter you have written under a strong impulse of indignation. When you come to re-read by the cold light of the morning after what you wrote yesterday, to begin to excise an offensive adjective here or cut out the sting of a sentence there, finally you cancel all you wrote and sit down to compose a milder and probably in the end a more effective letter. Obviously while you slept your mind was hard at work. The same process occurs when one is writing a book. How often I have sat for hours in my chair to produce perhaps half a dozen unsatisfactory lines, gone wearily to bed, and then when I sat down to my work on the following day found the story or article or broadcast flowed easily along.

I have only once been able to catch my mind at work with a waking dream. In 1911, when I was writing my novel *Carnival*, I wanted to find the simile for the effect of a heavy shower of rain on the road in front of a hansom cab. It eluded me and in the end I gave it up. Sixteen years later I dreamt that I was standing by the corner of Charing Cross Road near the old Alhambra Theatre watching Napoleon entering London at night at the head of a French army with fixed bayonets. 'That's what raindrops look like in the road,' I thought. 'Let me remember that.' And waking at that moment I did remember, and in due course used the simile in the book I was writing at the moment—*Rogues and Vagabonds*. In *Carnival* I had written about the Alhambra Theatre under the name of the Orient Palace of Varieties. So in sleep I had been search-

ing for that elusive simile since I wrote my second novel.

At one time I used to start work about half-past four in the afternoon and after dinner continue sometimes until four and even six in the morning. Recently I have evolved a new time-table to try to start on the book I am writing in the afternoon by three and continue until nine. Then, after a very light meal eaten alone, I work at anything else I have to do—a review, a broadcast, a magazine article or revision of the book I am writing until sometimes midnight, sometimes, under pressure, later. Then I go to bed, do a crossword puzzle, and after that read until perhaps four a.m. I sleep dreamlessly until eleven or twelve, drink a cup of coffee, read my letters and the papers, drink a glass of milk and potter round my flowers until it is time to return to the adjustable chair in which I always write. I use a very thick fountain pen with a very thick nib, and hold it so loosely that even after writing seventy-two books and countless articles the writer's callous is hardly perceptible on my middle. I have music played most of the time—chamber music mostly. I find this occupies the waste spaces of the mind and prevents me from thinking about matters extraneous to the work in hand. I play about with my manuscript a great deal with minor alterations of sentences, but only twice have I taken a wrong turning in a story and had to cancel perhaps half a dozen pages next day. I construct a whole volume on half a sheet of notepaper before I start and I have never been more than 5,000 words out with the length I have planned for a book. I use folios of twenty sheets marked alphabetically from A to Z, but marking one IJ so that the alphabets make 500 pages. If the book is longer the folios are marked AA, etc. I have been doing this so long that every letter of the alphabet helps to sustain my construction. I dictate letters and sometimes reviews, but nothing else.

# Democracy will Survive

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IN the year 1886, at the age of three, I was walking beside my brother's perambulator along a street in Portsmouth. Suddenly a chained gang of convicts on their way to or from the work they were doing on the harbour clanked past. Trim-bearded warders with carbines, in dark-blue uniforms, were fussing round their charges like sheepdogs. The face of one prisoner is still vivid in my mind's eye. He was tall and gaunt even to emaciation, with high cheekbones and a great beak of a nose, his eyes clouded to despair by suffering. I can still see the way he dragged behind him as he walked, a heavily chained leg. I was gazing back in bewilderment after that macabre procession when my nurse bade me crossly not to be staring after those poor men. I turned to overtake the perambulator and struck my cheek against a pointed brick in a high wall—one of the barrack walls perhaps. I can see now the great slow thunderdrops of blood upon the pavement, and the scar upon my cheek is visible to-day.

It is dangerous to attribute to childish emotions the capacity for passing a moral judgment, but I can with absolute certainty declare that I was shocked by such evidence of human misery at the time, and have remained shocked by it through the sixty-two years that have passed since I saw those convicts in fetters and heard those trim-bearded warders yapping orders at them. Thank God, no child could see such a sight in Portsmouth to-day, though, even as I ejaculate that, I remember what sights children have had to see during the last war. Still, they were due to enemy action, and in this country at any rate not de-

liberately conjured by cold-hearted authority. I daresay my temperament may be the kind of temperament that would always have led me to feel compassion for misery, but I am sure that early shock fired a spirit of rebellion in me against the lazy toleration of human want as a necessary part of the natural order. Two questions continuously vexed my childish imagination. The first was: 'Why should some people be poor and others comfortable?' The second was: 'Why do the huge countries of Asia allow themselves to be ruled by a few people from Europe?' The fact that I did ask myself those questions so long ago enables me to feel less disturbed by our present efforts to answer them than many of my contemporaries who were denied the advantage—as I think it—of what can be called youthful inquisitiveness.

The sooner young people start asking questions about the times they live in, the more easily will they adjust themselves to the all too often gloomy answers. I must say I find young people have been getting more and more alert during this difficult twentieth century through which we are blasting our way. I consider the average schoolboy to-day is a better citizen of the future than he was in my time. He will be a still better one when we learn to pay our schoolteachers the proper reward for their services, and get first call on the best brains in the country. The headmaster of a council school deserves at least as high a salary as a man at the top of some departmental tree in Whitehall. Yes, the young people of to-day are good value, and for that we have to thank the underpaid men and women who taught them, even if Latin and Greek have been too much neglected. An old friend asked me recently if I could understand the young people of to-day. 'I simply don't begin to grasp what they're talking about,' he complained. I told him I had no difficulty at all because

I found that the opinions of my youth, which once upon a time were regarded by my contemporaries and seniors alike as extravagant, affected and perverse, were the common sense of modern youth. 'In fact,' I said, 'from having been a minority man all my life I am fast becoming a majority man.' He snorted with contempt and then added, quite illogically in view of what I had just told him, 'You always had to be different from everybody else.'

I hope all this does not sound too much like what Lord Samuel in his talk<sup>1</sup> called 'f. tuous optimism'. The outlook for western man has never been graver, but I am too much interested by this crisis of humanity to sigh for the past. I have not sighed for the past since I left school. There I was so profoundly bored that I was always regretting the past. That boredom, of course, was the ungratified thirst for experience from which the growing boy ought always to suffer if he has anything in him. I used to regret the invention of steam because it had destroyed coaching and was likely to destroy sailing. I even regretted the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1752 because the loss of those twelve days had falsified the whole of our weather lore and upset all our popular celebrations. I still regret the invention of steam and the reform of the calendar. I regret even more the internal combustion engine and view with disgust the prospect of atomic energy whether it drive bombs or buses.

But, if experience has taught me anything, it has taught me the absurdity of supposing that it is ever possible to return to where one was before the new invention appeared. How ludicrous now seem the arguments of once upon a time about the future of the motor car! I had an early lesson about that. In 1903 or 1904, a young man



still in his twenties bought a bit of an old covered market in Oxford, and soon afterwards a signboard was erected on which were the words 'Morris's Oxford Garage'. That signboard is still there. 'When do you think there'll be enough cars to fill that enormous place Morris has bought?' I asked the manager of a small bicycle shop in the High. He was in his shirt-sleeves, a wiry man with a dark bristly moustache that seemed to emit sparks of energy. 'That place won't hold the cars that'll be wanting it in a few years' time,' snapped the future Lord Nuffield's manager. From that moment I ceased to speculate about the future of motoring and I was so much impressed by the prophecy that I began to worry about the future traffic in Oxford and advocated the immediate construction of a by-pass exactly where at this very moment, forty-five years later, it is being proposed to make one. Yes, I think it is a pity the internal combustion engine was ever invented, but when it was I wish there had been more Lord Nuffields to foresee what a revolution it would cause in the world we knew.

Poets and philosophers must take their share of blame for the obstinate conservatism which has so often impeded material progress when material progress was inevitable. For 2,500 years they have encouraged the prejudice of the present in favour of the past. Morals and manners were always better in the time of our grandfathers. Let us face up to it. The process of change usually is disagreeable: even a change of air involves packing and unpacking with the discomfort of a crowded train. During this first half of the twentieth century western man has had to adapt himself to continuous change more persistently than ever before in human history. Why should anybody have supposed that eastern man would remain static? Yet, even now, you will hear people bemoaning the reckless speed with which Dominion status has been accorded to India.

But that remark is verging on politics and I want to keep politics out of this. In my experience it is wiser for a professional observer like myself to remain independent of any party. His only loyalty then is to his own sincerity. That does not imply a cold-blooded detachment from current affairs. I tried once to express my political faith in words, and this is what I wrote:

'Democracy puts a strain upon the faith of humanity which can become unendurable in hours of disillusionment. Yet democracy, which provides the only rational view of a Divine political purpose, has survived so many assaults from without, so much undermining from within, that to deny the possibility of ever attaining the goal towards which it moves so slowly, so painfully, and sometimes so disgracefully, is to declare all the years of recorded history more useless than a heap of dead leaves and to offer them as a bonfire to the destructive and evil spirit of misdirected evolution.

If I reaffirm that faith now, perhaps I may be forgiven by progressives for calling attention to one or two threats to progress which come not from reactionaries but from themselves. Any attempt to endow the many prematurely with the advantages of the few must encourage mediocrity, because the process of levelling up requires levelling down at the same time. The mediocrity thus brought about is being fostered by the growing tendency of the many to rely upon a vicarious life provided for them by the few. In these days even generals have to be entertainers if they want to impress the multitude. Radio has encouraged the proprietorial rights which the public now possesses in what are called public men. I am not worried about them. If a man sets out to exploit his personality for the amusement

of the many, whether he be a novelist or a jockey, an actor or a professional footballer, he must not complain if he is treated as a servant of the public.

What I am worried about is this increasing tendency on the part of the many to sit back and obtain from the life of the few an illusion of life in themselves, because it seems to me that the result of this may be to atrophy the individual's capacity for living intensely and thus preserves his mediocrity. I notice already a diminution in the ability of children to amuse themselves. In my experience all the men and women who have achieved any position in the arts have had difficult childhoods, and the present tendency to coddle children's brains, laudable though the motive may be, is a menace to their future unless they are to watch others living and merely exist themselves.

And having said that, I remind myself that generalizations based on present circumstances are rash. When a man of my day looks back on his life he has to remember how much of it is coloured by two great wars and by the impact on him and his fellows of a bewildering mechanical development. It is too soon to feel sure that the trends he perceives are final moves in any direction. The arts as we understand the arts may expire under the pressure of still more revolutionary mechanical development. That does not mean I think that the creative impulse of humanity will necessarily expire. That creative impulse ceased long ago to produce Homers, Virgils and Dantes: in another hundred years it may not be capable of producing even a good thriller. Art as we understand it may seem a waste of energy in that world ahead whose tempo will be ten times that of to-day, but imagine what compensations posterity may enjoy. I am not trying to vie with Jules Verne when I suggest that some generation in the future will be setting out to reach other planets as only four and

## DEMOCRACY WILL SURVIVE

a half centuries ago Columbus set out to reach an unknown America. I cannot believe that the evolutionary destiny of man is to degenerate into the dreary perfection of the social insects or to destroy himself with his own Devilishly ingenious machines, spelt with a capital D, and abandon this small green earth of ours to rats. I believe that the spirit of man is in the likeness of God; nothing in my experience has shaken that belief.

# Living

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WHAT is the first thing youth should know if youth wants to live and not merely exist? I'm inclined to say it's to know what it does not want. When I was in my 'teens a firm belief existed among those responsible for my education that my destiny was the Civil Service after adding academic lustre to my school by academic triumphs at the University. I had other ideas. I remember contemplating my fellows in class one day and thinking how sad it must be to plan the future with an eye to a good pension. Safety first was not a catchword in the year 1897, but that's what I felt they were aiming at, and although at least half a dozen of those class mates whose ambition I deprecated became Colonial Governors or Chief Justices or rose high in the Treasury or Home Office, I am glad I knew by the age of fourteen that I did not want to be a colonial governor because by now I should be retired, and I doubt if many retired persons are getting as much out of life as they hoped they would when retirement was still far away.

Another career I knew I did not want was to go on the stage. When I was twenty I refused a seven years' contract as *jeune premier* at a London theatre to begin as soon as I went down from Oxford. I already had a notion that I would write, but what kept me from going on the stage was less a decision between two careers in the arts than a fear that the stage would involve an artificial existence, and I wanted to live, which few actors and actresses succeed in doing by my standards.

So much for that.

Now, it has to be admitted that success came to me early, and it may be asked why a fellow like myself who has enjoyed what so many believe to be the easy life which success ensures should be airing his opinions about living. Well, you know, early success for a writer is not quite such a walkover as some of you may think. Safety first has still to be avoided, and the temptation publishers and public both offer to give them again what they have rewarded you for giving them the first time must constantly be resisted. It was never a temptation to me because I have a natural dread of security. I wonder, if I were now sixteen instead of sixty-six, whether I should be able to make that assertion. I think I should. I have never valued possessions and I have never wasted a moment of sleep in worrying even about to-morrow, let alone next year. I have never invested a farthing. So I have never had to worry about the effect on my shares of threatened taxation and that sort of thing because I never owned a single share in a public company. When I have had money I have spent it on islands and houses, on books, flowers, trees, and music.

If I were a good fairy capable of bestowing a gift upon a human godson which above any would secure him a happy life I should give him an infinite capacity to love his fellow-men. I don't mean by that a passionate philanthropy. I mean an ability to be almost affectionately interested in every man or woman he met. This seems to me a *sine qua non* of a happy life, because people who reject good-will are really very few. I am often told of rude taxi-drivers and disobliging porters and so on, but I never meet them, and what is more, I don't expect to meet them. It does add a lot to the amenity of living when people are pleasant to you. You don't get put into wrong trains or lose your luggage, and think of how much fussing that saves you. I come back to this business of worry,

because the more I think about living the more firmly I am convinced that the defeat of worrying opens the most direct highway to happiness. And this applies as much to the past as to the future. The great majority of those who grumble to-day about our lost yesterday were grumbling just as much about that yesterday when it was their to-day. A good deal of it is regret for the youth which has left them. Too many young people of the present assume that they have missed the golden age and therefore that they are doomed to live less richly than their seniors. Shall I be presumptuous if I suggest that they are in fact leading a life much more nearly resembling what I at their age thought was a good life than any I could lead at their age. They are freed from the oppression which sat so heavily on young people of sensibility in my time, the oppression of feeling that not enough was being done to make life more tolerable for more people. What an immense amount of social humbug has been scrapped in the last thirty years! When I listen to one of those sentimental attempts to recapture the near past on the radio I sometimes wonder how many of those taking part in it would have enjoyed the reality of trying to convince unimaginative old-fashioned people that what they take nowadays for granted was not the extravagance of a dangerously revolutionary young man. Of course, we still have plenty of unimaginative old-fashioned people to contend with, and all too often they are convinced that they are neither unimaginative nor old-fashioned, which at any rate the reactionaries of my youth were proud of being. Our mission now in the interest of living is to convince some of these unimaginative and fundamentally old-fashioned advanced bureaucrats and politicians of to-day that living is an art, not a science.

I consider that the tyranny of the gasper cigarette, the admission of young men to universities without Greek,

the dilution of gin with synthetic fruit juices, the decay of conversation, the hermaphrodite innovations of too many famous old clubs, the belief that a page or two of Freud is a more valuable exercise for the human heart than love at first sight . . . but a full catalogue of what I consider the threats of modernity to the art of living would be tediously long.

A word about curiosity. When a man ceases to be curious his life is finished. I was distressed by the lack of curiosity shown by most of our young soldiers when I was recently travelling in the East, and I kept thinking of that wretched song we used to hear during the last war. 'Home Sweet Home again, no more roaming.'

Curiosity is the *perpetuum mobile* of the human mind. I find it strange that people should preoccupy themselves with the problem of their bodily exercise and be content to let their minds stagnate. I wish they would realize that after a certain age mental activity is, even physically, more beneficial than playing golf. The need of continuous development is paramount. Too many people allow theirs to be arrested and fail to take advantage of age. How often is heard the complaint 'I can't do what I used to be able to do'. If that grumbler were wise he would be able to do and say and think what twenty years earlier he would have been incapable of doing or saying or thinking. In almost every case those grumbles are concerned with physical failure. When people tell you their memory is not what it used to be they'll be quite cheerful about it. Memory should not rust for want of tending. I never kept a diary until I kept one for ten months during a period of intensive travelling for a book I have to write. I should fear to indulge my memory by doing its work for it with the pen. Memory should be the filter of experience, and too much experience gets through the sieve of a diary.



## ECHOES

Curiosity, zest, memory, a perpetual search for experience, a perpetual delight in people, books, trees, flowers, music . . . Abraham Cowley inspired me with something to aim at for my old age when I was hardly twenty:

*Ab, yet ere I descend to th' grave,  
May I a small house and large garden have,  
And a few friends, and many books; both true,  
Both wise, and both delightful too!*

*Hoc erat in votis.* This was in my prayers, and it has been granted to me.

# My Time of Life

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I MUST begin with an apology. Fortune has granted me up till now everything to make life enjoyable, and I feel some embarrassment in talking about it to an unseen audience among which will be many who may think that they have never been granted the opportunities I have had to test their capacity for enjoying life, and who may reasonably feel irritated by hearing somebody expatiating on them. So let me say right off that in my opinion the enjoyment of life does not depend on the extent of one's experience so much as on its intensity, on that and the individual's ability to surmount the frustrations which from earliest childhood rise before his path. During this century increasing importance has been attached to this business of frustration, and at the moment the fashion in education is inclined to coddle children mentally to excess. The strength of the child's will is too often insufficiently tested. He gets his own way so easily over petty desires that ambition is drugged. When I look back at my own childhood, I see it as a continuous battle for self-expression in the course of which I never surrendered my main objective which was ultimate independence in every application of the word. If fortune had ruled this to be unattainable I should have had no enjoyment out of life. I never got the least satisfaction from winning skirmishes. I wanted a major victory.

One gloomy November afternoon, two months before my fourth birthday, I was sitting in the dining-room window of 54 Avonmore Road, West Kensington, gazing out at the waste ground opposite, on which not even the

foundations of the odd numbers of Avonmore Road had yet been started. A melancholy drizzle was falling, and the only living creature in sight was a barefoot boy in a pair of ragged breeches and a torn shirt who was rattling a stick along the decrepit paling of the waste ground as he went whistling past on the other side of the road. And he was wearing braces! True, his breeches had only two buttons, but they were fore and aft and so they kept his breeches up. My soul was swept by a sudden and immense envy of that tatterdemalion boy who could wear braces instead of the detestable kind of flannel chest-protector to which my own knickerbockers were attached, who could walk about in the rain, who could whistle, who could rattle a stick along a paling, and who to a wretched prisoner of the nursery seemed to possess the freedom of the world. In that moment I made up my mind that the most important thing in life was independence, and I think that because I was able at so early an age to conceive independence as an abstract good I was able to avoid the mistake so many children used to make of wasting their energies in fighting against the immediate control of nurse or governess. Nowadays, children are so much indulged in the matter of their childish whims and wants that they are often completely unequipped for the battle of life beyond the schoolroom. I was more lucky. I was brought up in that dull fog-end of the Victorian epoch which is now being hailed as a golden age, but which was actually no more than a pinchbeck age, in spite of its contemporary romanticization. I, emerging from adolescence at the end of that devitalized decade which some credulous duffer called the naughty 'nineties, might have been suffocated by it if I had not recognized as early as the autumn of 1886 that independence was a goal which had to be won at some date in the future by my own efforts. I hope that

ragged boy is now a happy septuagenarian looking back in contentment at a life as full and felicitous as he inspired me to aim at sixty-one years ago.

Mind you, those efforts were pretty tough, and they had to be sustained over a period of fifteen years of childhood and youth, which is the equivalent of at least thirty years of later life. I fought a long campaign to dodge going into the Civil Service. A feeling prevailed among my masters at St. Paul's that one day I should achieve a place among the first three or four in the Civil Service examination. For at least three years I had to idle hard in order to cure them of this obsession, because I knew that if I were to enter the Civil Service my independence as I conceived it would be destroyed. Yes, it was a dour struggle. I suffered one heavy defeat when a preparation class was started for incorrigibly idle boys. This I was compelled to attend every evening from six to eight. The boredom of those hours was such that I was compelled to do my homework in order to pass the time, with the result that I was top of the class of which I had been successfully bottom the previous term. Hopes ran high again of a Balliol scholarship for me, of a couple of Firsts, and of the Civil Service at the end of it. I had to take strong measures, and at the age of fifteen I told the High Master of St. Paul's School that I would *not* try to win a University scholarship. I had found my scholarship at the school far too much of a handicap to my independence. I do not want to brag, but I must make it clear that for a schoolboy of fifteen to beard the tremendous beard of the late Frederick William Walker was a feat something between David's assault on Goliath and look the Giant Killer's attack on Blunderbore. The interview ended with these words: 'You could have been the greatest Greek scholar since Jebb or Porson, and you have flung it all away to

swagger up and down the corridors of this school with the manners and appearance of a deboshed clerk.' With that excommunication booming in my ears I retired from Greek and Latin to study history in a leisurely class which had been formed a few years earlier to house the bulk of G. K. Chesterton. Even so the struggle for independence went on. Finally, a day or two after my seventeenth birthday, I decided that the boredom of school which I had been enduring for over eight years must finish. That was at the end of January 1900. For a fortnight I went almost without sleep, and thus I achieved the appearance of a nervous breakdown. A sensible doctor advised my parents that their wisest course would be to remove me from school, and a few days before the relief of Ladysmith I, too, was relieved.

Now what I want to stress is that I always kept the ultimate goal in view. I was not content to fight for liberty in minor matters and then surrender on the main issue, which is what so many people make the mistake of doing. I also knew very early what I wanted in a large way from life and equally well what in detail I did *not* want. I was not prepared to enter any profession which would threaten my independence. Armed as I was with a boundless curiosity about life I investigated the possibilities of numerous careers and turned them all down. Curiosity is certainly one of the chief guarantees of life's enjoyment, and the older one grows the more vitally necessary it is to preserve one's curiosity. Middle age begins with its decline, and the first failure of curiosity you detect in yourself must be jumped upon immediately and ruthlessly.

The year before last I only just escaped making a fool of myself in this matter of curiosity. I was invited to write the history of what the Indian Army did in the war,

and being ill at the time I refused the invitation. No doubt illness was responsible for my attitude, but that's no valid excuse for such a lamentable lack of curiosity. By a piece of luck I really did not deserve, the offer was repeated and I happened to tell General Sir Ian Hamilton about it. That wonderful veteran was so indignant with my hesitation that I wrote off at once and accepted the job.

When I look back at the state of mind which nearly led me into missing nine months of unbroken enjoyment, I shiver like one who has just saved himself from falling over a precipice. Yet most of my friends would have applauded the caution of a man in his sixty-fifth year who had refused to undertake the travelling involved in preparing for such a task. The General, however, who is now in his ninety-fifth year, scoffed at sixty-four. So in nine months I have travelled thousands of miles by sea, by land and by air, between Hong Kong in the East and Tunis in the West. I have seen the livid greenish grey mountains of Keren and the slim silver poplars of Damascus. I have seen Tobruk and Alamein and the car-scattered, mine-infested western desert. I have sat among the rosemary and junipers and sapphire sea-holly of the Tunisian dell where General Tucker of the Fourth Indian Division received the surrender of General von Arnheim. I have stood in that lovely cemetery where 2,600 British and Indian dead lie at peace above the Sangro river between the Adriatic and the Apennines. I have travelled all over India from Karachi to the Brahmaputra, from Madras to the ultimate fort on the North-West Frontier where the Union Jack still flutters. I have driven forty miles up the Ledo road which in a year or two the jungle will have regained, and seen from the head of the Paunsao pass seven blue ranges and the snows of the Himalaya beyond. In Burma I have driven down the Chocolate Staircase to the

tumbling waters of the Manipur and up through the scarlet rhododendron groves above Tiddim with a green abyss, three thousand feet below the narrow road. I have camped in the jungle and walked up the 900 steps of Mandalay hill and listened to the bells of the old Moulmein Pagoda in the light breeze. I have seen the thronged road to Carton and wandered along the now empty beaches of Malaya. I have been in fantastic Arakan and sailed across the Indian Ocean to the Andamans and the Nicobars. I have noted the kinked tails of the ordinary cats of Siam and Malaya and found their manners exactly like those of their royal brethren. I have made the arduous journey to the exclusive kingdom of Nepal. I have met innumerable interesting people of many nationalities and received everywhere the most generous hospitality. In fact I never enjoyed myself more in my life. And all this I should have missed but for the luck of the right mentor at the critical moment. It's a lesson I shall not forget and I shall never again risk refusing such an invitation. Illness is liable to throw anybody off his balance but it should not be accepted as a valid excuse for running away from life in the future. The people I am sorry for are the people who never feel really well. The chronic dyspeptic who enjoys life is a hero.

On the other hand I believe that life cannot be enjoyed by anybody who has not known pain. One of fortune's gifts to me, as precious as any, has been a great deal of acute pain from early childhood onwards. I realize now what an armoury early pain provides for age and how much the threat of it in the background enhances the enjoyment of life while it stays in the background. Let it be understood, I am not suggesting that continuous pain is a boon.

Two or three months after my eighth birthday I almost

tore one of my hands in half on a hook. What remains most vividly in my mind of that unpleasant business? Not the agony of having my fingers bent back three times a day to keep my hand from curling up permanently, but the joy of lying on a sofa on sunny May days and having read to me the adventures of Sherlock Holmes which were making their first appearance in the *Strand Magazine*.



# A Week on the Way to Seventy

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I WISH I could muster as much respectful emotion on entering my seventieth year as once upon a time the prospect of that magical double figure ten drawing closer every day evoked in my youthful heart. Never again to be able to contain one's age within a single numeral! Life would then begin at last. I can remember standing in front of a mirror on my tenth birthday to meditate upon the reflection of maturity therein presented on an icy January morning sixty years ago. I doubt if thirteen provided a comparable sense of achievement, although thirteen was memorable, and I recapture from the past an emotion half compassionate, half contemptuous for twelve-year-olds. We missed in my youth the contemporary catchword 'teenagers'; I hope that modern youth enters 'teen-agedness' with a suitably elated conviction of its own self-importance.

Nearly forty years ago Max Beerbohm, who is now half-way through his eightieth year, told me that it would give him pleasure to reach seventy because he should consider that every year he survived after the allotted span was a gift from fortune. To-day the expectation of life is said to be longer. Nevertheless, in recent years I have lost so many old friends that I cannot be sensible of this extension of the allotted span, and I shall certainly not take for granted any years that may be allowed to me after seventy.

Probably I shall be speaking for most people of my age when I insist upon the fact that we feel no essential change in ourselves as we grow older. My thirtieth, fortieth,

fiftieth and sixtieth years have all been entered without any notable change from the spirit in which I entered my twentieth. And now, on the threshold of seventy, I am just as rash, just as curious, just as industrious, just as fond of good company, good wine, good cigars and late hours, and even just as much of a minority man, though I find contemporary youth so much to my taste that if I be granted some of those extra years I may end as a majority man yet. In a word, I am as much in love with life as I always have been. A friend of mine, just sixty, announced recently in his newspaper column that he was on the downward slope of life. And what inspired this melancholy reflection? The discovery of his inability to climb up some mountain with the zest of once upon a time. I hesitate to profane with my irreverence the sacred topic of athletic exercise, but I am old enough—yes, I really am old enough—to express a firm opinion that whatever disillusionment may accompany the old age of some men is nearly always due to what I consider their insensate devotion to physical activity after the body has begun to be weary of it. Far from condoling with my sexagenarian climber upon his intimations of debility, I congratulate him upon what I hope will henceforth be his freedom from the tyranny of exercise when he ought to be sitting in a chair, reading or writing or talking.

The exceptional man can still ride to hounds at eighty, but I doubt if such a man has taxed his mind overmuch in the course of a physically active life, and when the feebleness of the body at last asserts itself such a man will inevitably feel that life has lost its savour. But why a man with a rich intellectual and emotional life and a well-stored memory should feel old because he can no longer climb a mountain without puffing, or outplay Colonel Bogey on his local golf-links, passes my comprehension.

Why should an old man be ashamed of his deterioration at golf? '*Anno domini*, I'm afraid,' he will mutter apologetically. But ask him to learn a new language or even to read a tough book, and he will be proud that his age gives him an excuse *not* to indulge in such intellectual energy. He is much more concerned about the treachery of his wrist than about the treachery of his memory. Indeed, I detect in many of my contemporaries what almost amounts to an unhealthy pride in the gradual fossilization of their minds.

Perhaps it is the obstinate persistence of one's essential self which makes it so difficult for those who are not reminded by the failure of their physical accomplishment to realize that they are old. I always think that it is a good lesson in the passage of time to count backwards. I who was born in 1883 cannot feel that 1883 is so very far away from the present. Yet, the other way round, it would mean that I would have had to be born two years before Waterloo if I wanted to talk in 1882 of entering my seventieth year, and with that realization I am immediately awed by Shakespeare's 'dark backward and abysm of time.' Yet why? After all, I can remember sitting on the knees of at least one old pensioner who fought at Waterloo.

This brings me to the advantage of a good memory. So many people lose most of the first, and by far the longest decade of their life by failing to preserve a continuous memory. Old men proverbially live in the past, but what a disjointed past it too often is! And because it contains so many gaps, such old men are apt to find themselves out of touch with the present, whereas, if, by exercising the memory, they have throughout their lives made the past an eternal present, their minds will not age with their bodies. It seems to me, though I may be wrong, that our

present education neglects to promote that reverence for the living memory which is owed to it. Mnemosyne or Memory, the titan daughter of Heaven and Earth, was the mother of the nine Muses, and it is Mnemosyne whom Hesiod, in one of his Homeric hymns, makes Hermes salute first of all the immortals. I cannot believe that Mnemosyne would have been much interested in the snippets of information which contemporary fashion demands from memory. It was with the deliberate intention of honouring Mnemosyne that, except during two years of intensive travel, I have never kept a diary. I suspect that nothing is more destructive of the *living* memory that the Muses inherited from their mother than a diary, unless of course the diarist be a Pepys whose diary is the creative life of his imagination, and therefore as such able to preserve the living past in an eternal present.

Any man entering his seventieth year, be he townsman or countryman, must ask himself whether the present-day child can retain so sharp an impression of its childhood as he does. That question will have to be answered by somebody broadcasting. Yet, I will hazard my opinion that in such an unimaginable year of the future all sorts of things which people of my age regard through a distracting blur of noise, colour, height, and speed, will emerge touched by the enchantment of distance as vivid experiences of the youthful mind to-day. I base this conviction on the sharp impact New York made upon me in my thirtieth year. I daresay New York in 1912 would have seemed just a blur of noise, colour, height, and speed if I had been born in 1843. Of course, it *is* fantastic for me to walk along Kensington High Street to-day, or for that matter Piccadilly, Regent Street or the Strand, and recall what they were sixty-five years ago. That is where the countryman scores. He may miss the

smock-frocks and the gleaners and the wagons, but the essential country scene is what it was once upon a time.

But of Kensington High Street and Hammersmith Road practically nothing is left of my childhood, not even the old milestone that said 'London 4 miles Hounslow 7 miles'. How incredible it seems now that on May Day morning the chimney-sweeps used to dance down the middle of the road in wicker-cages covered with leaves—Jacks-in-the-Green with the centuries behind them to remind us that once there was a Maypole in the Strand. The old cries of London were still heard—'Cherry ripe' in summer's prime, 'Any knives or scissors to grind?', 'Any pots, pans or kettles to mend?', 'Catch 'em alive-o' by a man wearing a top-hat surrounded by a fly-paper, or with so sweet a melancholy 'Who'll buy my lavender?' at summer's dusty end. Gypsy caravans as brightly coloured as a bouquet of flowers, with swarthy beauties wearing ostrich-plumed hats, would pass slowly by, returning to pick up the dark man with earrings who sat on the top of the area steps mending a cane-seated chair. Can it be true that at the age of five I was always fearful lest the gypsies in London should steal me away and stain my body with walnut juice?

And then the beggars! When I hear some of my contemporaries deploring the sins of the welfare state I wonder how clearly they remember the beggars of their youth. Foreigners used to be horrified by what they felt was the brutal indifference of London in the 'eighties to human misery and suffering. No child sees those mutilated or starving spectres of humanity to-day, but some of us who saw them have not forgotten them, and so we are able to feel less indignant about the expense of social amelioration.

But it is when I conjure up the external appearance of

the familiar surroundings of sixty-five years ago that I begin to realize that indeed I am entering my seventieth year. I look back to the sight of a half-finished Olympia, to old two-storeyed country-houses with gardens in front a hundred yards long reaching to wicket gates opening on Hammersmith Road, to the mulberry-garden that was the playground of my prep. school, and to the sea of orchard blossom on either side of the road beyond Chiswick, by which the old green horse-tram jogged slowly from Hammersmith Broadway to Kew Bridge. However, it is pleasant—or unpleasant—to reflect that the traffic problem was nearly as acute in the 'eighties as it is to-day. The only unbroken progress between Kensington and, say, Liverpool Street Station was along Birdcage Walk, just as to-day the only unbroken progress is along the Mall which swallowed it up, and you always allowed for a block of at least twenty minutes at the Mansion House.

In my fourteenth year I read, without a keen appreciation of its excellence, *Cicero De Senectute*—Cicero on Old Age—a good example of the way Latin and Greek were too often spoilt for us by the unimaginative choice of desiccated schoolmaster. Cicero was writing at a time when the prospect for civilization seemed as menacing and dark as it seems to us, and now, with a greater capacity for understanding his observations about old age than I possessed at thirteen, I find it a tranquil and reassuring thesis, though poor old Cicero himself met a violent end. There is only one notable privilege of old age which he omitted to mention, and I cherish it so dearly that were I the best of golfers I would sacrifice my prowess with eagerness in order to attain it. That privilege—indeed it is more than a privilege, it is a luxury—that luxury is to escape not from the fevers of love nor from the ache of

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ambition but from sea-sickness. Believe me, you bad sailors who are still in middle-age and have to make journeys by sea, that the greatest luxury of old-age is freedom from sea-sickness. When a man in his seventieth year can stand on a reeling deck and survey with surprise the effect that the waves are having upon his fellow-voyagers, then indeed he can say with Sir Thomas Browne: 'In seventy years, a man may have a deep gust of the world; know what it is, what it can afford, and what 'tis to have been a man.'